

I initially visited Kabaira in 2003 just after the business commenced. The first time I used Kabaira as a diving operator was in early 2004. Rather than produce a separate report for each visit, which is repetitious, I have combined all the reports into one document.

I have dived with this operator on the following dates for an average duration of three weeks on each trip. Click to view each report.

- [Report One – April 2004](#)
- [Report Two – October 2004](#)
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Not all the reports below are positive. As such a little of my background should be known before reading them. I was qualified to dive in 1977 and have completed over 3000 logged dives (I gave up logging dives in 1997). In 1989 I became instructor qualified and operated my own diving business until 1996. I have dived in many areas in Asia and the South Pacific and have a good working knowledge of dive operations and hospitality.

The below reports are in no way meant to cause financial hardship to Kabaira Dive Rabaul, however, as a potential customer you should know how the operation has been operated in the past. Past performance is the only indication that can be used for future performance.

If you dive with Steven Woolcott, and your impressions are favourable, please provide a report to me and I will provide an updated report.

## **REPORT ONE – APRIL 2004**

### **General**

Kabaira Dive Rabaul and Lodge located about 30 minutes drive west of Rabaul at Ataliklikin Bay and provides an ideal base from which to dive the western side of the Gazelle Peninsula. The business is relatively new and as such, there are still “teething” problems as the operation becomes established.

Steven Woolcott - a young PNG born Australian and qualified PADI dive master is the owner and operator of Kabaira Dive and is exceptionally enthusiastic about the diving potential of Rabaul. Steven is assisted by his mother Lyn, who looks after the financial side of the business, his father Bert, who is a qualified marine mechanic who ensures that the boat outboard engines are running as smoothly as possible, and Lu-Lu (pronounced Loo-Loo) who is a PNG national whose responsibilities encompass dive logistics and ensuring that your stay is as pleasurable as it should be. Steven and Lu Lu’s wide ranging local contacts enable access to dive locations that may not be otherwise accessible because of land ownership issues.

Everyone at Kabaira Dive were very friendly and hospitable. Lu-Lu especially deserves mention due to his excellent local knowledge and organisation of a number of unusual and interesting activities.

Take note that Kabaira does not have VISA card facilities. You will need to arrange pre payment or bring lots of kina.

The current pricing for accommodation, food and diving (as at July 2005) is reasonable if you take into account that the operation is a very small concern and does not have new boat, up-market accommodation and the like. If you are perspective visitor please be aware that Kabaira Dive is not a resort or up-market diving operation suitable for twenty divers. Rather it's more of a "homestay/lodge" experience ideally suited to a very small group of divers. In my opinion this is what makes Kabaira Dive unique, and I will continue to return to Kabaira unless price, service or consistency declines.

### **Experience and Equipment**

Steven has a dive master qualification and has gained much of his diving knowledge from working aboard large catamarans based out of Cairns, Australia. Lu-Lu is an open water diver with excellent boat handling skills.

Kabaira Dive uses aluminium 90 cu SCUBA tanks and has a portable Bauer junior air compressor for filling tanks. Diving equipment for hire is minimal and it is best to bring your own equipment. Contact Steven before you arrive if you require hire equipment.

Nitrox and 100% oxygen for out gassing on decompression or safety stops is not available, although a small C sized oxygen bottle and oxygen regulator is carried aboard the boat on all dives for emergencies only.

### **Fast Boats**

The operator uses two banana style boats. The smaller has a 40 HP 2 stroke mercury outboard and is used for local trips and the larger boat is used for visits to the Talesi islands and for larger dive groups. The smaller boat does not have a roof for sun protection nor does it have a two-way radio, GPS or depth sounder. The larger boat is powered by a 70 HP 2 stroke Yamaha outboard, with an auxiliary engine, VHF two-way radio, depth sounder and roof for sun protection. There is no boarding ladder on either boat and divers are required to climb over the side after removing their tanks and weight belts. In addition, Steven has access to other banana boats located closer to Rabaul Harbour for diving the wrecks in this area.

Both boats are in serviceable condition, however, engines seem to always malfunction and break down, no matter how thorough the maintenance schedule or vigilant the operator. Bert is always handy to make instant repairs should this occur (which it did a few times). This seems to always occur whether in PNG or the Solomon Islands.

To my knowledge, there was no medical kit or other safety equipment (other than emergency oxygen and regulator) carried aboard the boat.

### **Diving and Staff**

All dives are accompanied either by Steven or Lu-Lu and they both will go out of their way to ensure you can dive or visit the localities you are interested in.

Diving schedules are very flexible and Steven and Lu-Lu are very accommodating. You dive the site you want to dive - weather permitting. Dive profiles are totally up to you – and you alone. For those divers who are not reliant on others and are experienced enough to be able to do this, it is very welcome news, however, if you are a new diver it is advised to ask Steven for a dive briefing and dive plan before entering the water. The flexibility of this operator is one aspect which will ensure repeat business from me.

Occasionally a days notice is required if you want to dive a location that is not usually available – this enables Steven and Lu-Lu time to arrange access with the land owners.

Nearly every dive is conducted “live” with the boat not being anchored.

Overall, the diving was fairly organised and there was little wait time after a decision was made to dive.

One aspect that was lacking was Steven’s specific knowledge about many of the dive sites. Many times upon asking what could be seen at a reef I received the reply that he did not know as he had not dived it before. On other occasions, he only had an idea of what was there. This is only a minor point, but it’s nice to have an idea what to look for, especially if uncommon animals inhabit or frequent the site.

#### **Lack of Dedicated Dive Cleaning Area**

The area for cleaning, drying and storing diving equipment was inadequate. There was only one garden hose and there were no large baths available for gear washing. Space for gear hanging was also at a premium. After a few days we found a large aluminium bowl (about a meter wide) which we used as a dive gear wash tub. Luckily, we were the only divers staying at the lodge. If there was a group of six then cleaning gear would be close to impossible.

Steven informed me that this area is to be upgraded in the near future with more space being made available.

#### **Talele Island Trip (located off the coasts near the Baining Mountains)**

The 3 day trip to the Talele Islands was well worth the time, and no doubt with better weather conditions the diving off the ribbon reefs would be impressive. The island we camped on is what the average person would envisage a tropical island to look like – white sand, tall trees and clear warm water, and luckily no mosquitos or sandflies, unlike other islands.

The camping is basic (which is the way it was advertised) but not uncomfortable. Steven and Lu-Lu erect a large tarpaulin between two trees as shelter from rain and sleeping mats are provided. I did notice that several relatively important items were missing from his equipment – namely a small hurricane lamp to use at night and a suitable torch; consequently we ate dinner in the dark. I recommend you check Steven’s list before departure to ensure everything you want or believe you require is placed aboard the boat.

Two aspects of the island trip concerned me. One was the disposal of rubbish, which was left beneath a tree. Jolanda and I ended up taking the non-biodegradable material back to Kabaira in our dive bags.

The second issue revolved around hygiene, especially cooking and washing up. Dish washing detergent was not used - although sand does make a pretty good replacement. Furthermore, sanitary locations were not allocated which resulted in several small deposits being accidentally exposed!

Drinking water was carried in glass bottles and large plastic containers with the bottles being shared between individuals. Although I do not have a problem with this, many people may prefer to bring their own bottle and refill it from a large container to minimise the chance of cross infection between individuals. Meningitis can be contracted by cross infection of saliva when drinking from the same bottle.

### **Concerns**

Please note that the following concerns are generally minor in relation to the operator's good points and can be rectified very easily. If you stay at Kabaira and have similar concerns mention them with Steven or Lu-Lu and hopefully they will be rectified.

It was disturbing to note that on one dive the boat was anchored on a rarely dived pristine reef system where the opportunity for anchor damage to delicate hard and soft corals was very high. Although this was witnessed only once, I'd hope that in future an underwater mooring would be used – or the dive boat remained "live".

A lack of specialist marine identification books available at the dive lodge. I have been told that this will soon be rectified by the purchase of several books on fish, coral and nudibranch identification.

A major concern was Steven fishing whilst we were diving and his overall poor environmental attitude. Personally, I do not like to capture and kill fish and I found it slightly upsetting to be diving with a school fish only to come up from the dive to discover Steven had caught one or two. On nearly every dive trip fishing lines were trolled behind the boat in the hope of "snagging the big one". I frequently consume fish, so this may sound slight hypocritical, but I really don't believe diving and fishing are a particularly good mix when advertising yourself as a ecological business.

Steven's other hobby is game fishing and it is understandable that he would want to fish when on the water, but diving is his livelihood and as such should be his main focus with diving clients.

### **Accommodation and food - Kabaira Lodge**

The lodge is located in the same area as the dive operation and the owner resides on-site. The accommodation is more than adequate for a travelling diver who is accustomed to travelling to relatively remote locations. If you are expecting five star service, turned down bed sheets with a Swiss chocolate left on the pillow, and a private bathroom, then the lodge is not for you. There are five rooms, each with two or more single beds. Doors and windows have flyscreens so there is minimal privacy and there is only one power

point in each room. If you have photographic equipment that required recharging, bring a power board or double adapter. A number of portable fans provide cooling. An annoying aspect of the accommodation was the lack of hooks or other hanging points for cloths, towels etc. A few nails would not go astray!

Bathroom facilities are shared with one toilet and one cold shower. The eating area is located near the water in an open air long-house about 30 seconds walk from your room. I liked the long house and lying in the hammocks listening to tropical rain was an excellent way to pass the time between dives.

If you want a more up-market style of accommodation and do not like the idea of the lodge, then Steven can arrange alterative motel style accommodation in Rabaul.

The food was very average with the exception of a few evening meals prepared by Lu-Lu which were delicious. Steven for the most part seemed to forget that we didn't have our own food supply and were therefore dependent on him for meals.

Breakfast generally consisted of two pieces of paw paw, water and toast; sometimes when Steven remembered, we had eggs. Lunch was very ad-hoc, usually toast with peanut butter or jam, or some snack bought at the market, or sometimes, nothing at all. Dinner consisted of rice and vegetables cooked various ways and occasionally fish. The best meals we had was when we went to the market and bought our own ingredients which Lu-Lu used to make a delicious meal. If Lu-Lu is preparing the meals expect something different and tasty. The food needs improvement.

To be fair, when we visited Kabaira the regional game fishing completion was in full swing. Lyn and Bert (Steven's parents) were the organisers of the event, and had little spare time to devote to the running of the lodge. In short Steven's domestic organisational abilities outside diving need a little work!

Although the food situation was a little annoying and frustrating at times, it was not a major problem, but something that a prospective visitor should keep in mind.

### **Overall Opinion and ratings**

I would definitely use this operator again despite his short-falling in some areas. The areas indicated for concern are easily rectified and his easy going attitude and enthusiasm to please provides an environment conducive to an enjoyable diving vacation. I recommend this operator if you are intending to visit Rabaul. The website address of Kabaira Dive is <http://www.kabaira.com/>. Make sure you mention my name - Iain Williams.

## **REPORT TWO – OCTOBER 2004**

In October 2004 I revisited Kabaira Dive located near Rabaul on the Gazelle Peninsula for three weeks of diving .

It is pleasing to note that many of the teething problems associated with this new diving operator have been rectified since my last visit in April 2004.

Steven no longer engages in fishing whilst running divers to local sites. His local knowledge of the location of various reefs has improved with the purchase of a Garmin GPS, and his knowledge of what to see on each reef has improved with the purchase of a fish identification book.

Dive moorings have not been installed, however, I have been told that these will soon be deployed. In the interim until the moorings are installed, Steven and Bert try their best to avoid coral formations when they anchor the dive boat by anchoring onto the loose coral rubble found on most reefs. The dive boat (named Whaler) now has a ladder which is quite serviceable and moveable from one side of the boat to the other.

During my three weeks at Kabaira, the outboard engines performed flawlessly and all dives were conducted at the time Steven scheduled the dive to start. Dive locations were discussed the night before and were dependent upon weather conditions the following morning. The diving style was very easy and there was ample opportunity to conduct the dive profile you wanted to dive and spend the bottom time you wanted to spend. The only requirement being that you returned to the boat after the safety stop with 20-30 bar remaining in your tank. Several of my dives were in excess of 70 minutes and Steven never complained about the time waiting on the boat for me to surface.

The plantation house accommodation is clean, and although spartan, is more than adequate for divers who are used to basic style accommodation. I enjoyed the plantation house as it is an original style plantation house that has not been altered to cater to the whims of up-market travellers. The house has a style of its own and it's relaxing to lie on one of the several beds listening to the waves on the beach. Each of the two private rooms have had a shelf fitted along with a pipe for hanging clothes, etc (ask for some coat-hangers if you want them). For photographers Steven has now supplied two power boards suitable for charging batteries, cameras and the like, however neither have surge protectors. Portable fans are available to keep your laptop cool for photo processing. The water supply system has since been upgraded and hot water is now available for showering at anytime. For drinking, rainwater is stored in a large "tufa" style water.

The dive cleaning area has not been enlarged and is rather small. There is only a smallish bowl available for gear washing (great size for one diver, but too small for several divers at a time washing equipment). However, during my stay Steven was negotiating to purchase a large fibreglass tub which would be ideal to wash equipment in.

The food situation has improved and the meals I received were more than suitable for the style of accommodation. If you want anything extra, ask and you will probably receive. Lyn, Bert and Steven are very accommodating and really do strive to make your stay enjoyable.

Steven, Lyn and Bert are trying to develop their operation so it will remain small and basic, but still provide the service expected from larger operations. More importantly, Steven wants to keep the operation small and personal to be able to alter locations and diving styles to suit individual guests whilst maintaining high safety standards.

I believe this philosophy is what will keep Kabaira Dive in business, and although the dive boats and outboard engines are more functional than pretty, the easy going nature of the staff, reasonable fees, and the opportunity to dive when and how you want to, will ensure I return to Kabaira.

### **REPORT THREE – JULY 2005**

Rather than repeat much of what has been written above, below is a copy of my field notes.

It seems that whilst there was an initial improvement from my first visits in 2003/2004, there has been a steady decline since in service, reliability of equipment and consistency in operation. Steven's attitude has also altered somewhat .

#### **FIELD NOTES (notes compiled by Iain Williams)**

- Lu Lu now does not work at Kabaira and has been replaced by Alvin. Alvin is an excellent cook and has a strong interest in cooking. As such, the meals have improved 100%.
- Steven and Lyn talk a lot about things to do and places to visit, but when you become interested you discover it is next to impossible to actually get to the locations. This becomes very frustrating.
- Staff are not using dive reef moorings, even when they are present. I have seen the anchor from the dive boat destroy clumps of coral and sponge. Sometimes conditions preclude the use of a mooring, but every attempt should be made to use a mooring when possible.
- Rooms never cleaned. Towels in short supply. I had to ask daily for a towel
- Fruit – hardly any available. How can they run out of fruit! Then they only supply paw paw which is the cheapest fruit to buy at the market. No pineapple, guava, passionfruit, etc. Several breakfasts I only had toast. No consistency in operation or food supply.
- The two hummocks that used to be available are no longer available for guest use.
- Caught two large fish, however, I doubt I will see anything from them. I was correct. I was given tinned tuna and the fish was kept for the family.

- TV continually turned on. Music loud.
- Steven is a pig! Body odour is not nice, especially when eating. Alvin (national helper and cook) is cleaner and better behaved. Steven is very immature and talks mostly bullshit – he also is very moody. Lyn (mother) condones his attitude and actions by laughing and saying “Oh Steven”
- Steven’s hygiene is awful. He never washes his hands and handles guest food when his hands are filthy and covered in grease and dirt from repairing the boat, etc. Steven said to me when I queried his cleanliness “that it was bad luck if I came down with a bug as he is clean”.
- At dinner Steven eats from the main serving bowls, occasionally sneezing and snorting at the serving table, before dishing out the food he wants to his own plate. It appears Steven has been brought up by “wolves” – but I don’t want to insult wolves!
- Steven brings out a sandwich for me wrapped in his dirty hands – very poor hygiene.
- Rubbish and used batteries on the beach in front of the lodge. This should be cleaned up to improve the beach frontage.
- Steven still anchored his boat and has not deployed permanent reef moorings. Nor has the dive cleaning station been enlarged or improved.
- Boat engine continually broke down. If it wasn’t the engine it was the battery or wiring.
- Kabaira bus continually broke down.

**REPORT FOUR – JUNE 2006 (updated Feb 2007)**

**Jolanda and I have decided that we will not use this diving operator again, unless there is significant changes in the owner's attitude. Other areas in the world provide better service, attitude and environmental awareness for the same price outlay (diving is comparable if not better).**

**I gave considerable thought before publishing this report, realising that the report maybe detrimental to Kabaira Dive's business. Hopefully Steven Woolcott will rectify the problems, and more importantly improve his attitude and environmental awareness.**

**If you dive with Kabaira Dive, please feel free to e-mail me and report your experience. I will definitely upgrade this report if and when appropriate.**

Rather than replicate much of what has been written in earlier reports, I have instead copied my field notes.

This was my fifth visit to Rabaul and the fourth time I have used Kabaira Dive as a diving operator. My first visit (to dive and stay) was in early 2004 after inspecting the area in 2003 just after the business began operation. At this time, there were many problems – many of them being teething problems that any new operation in PNG has to endure. I assumed that these problems would eventually be solved with time and experience.

**It would appear this is not the case.**

Other than a acquiring some SCUBA diving equipment, renovations to the eating area, and altering the plantation house to facilitate more rooms, the operation (in our opinion) has gone backwards.

Building infrastructure is falling apart, rats plague the establishment, boat and car engines breakdown on a regular basis, GPS and depth sounders on the dive boat do not work reliably because of poor wiring and no maintenance, generator operation and reliability is intermittent (during black outs). This is to mention but a few of the shortcomings.

Unfortunately Steven Woolcott, the owner, has become exceptionally arrogant and does not treat guests in a way that they should be treated (unless he wants to). Furthermore, his discourteous treatment of staff is also offensive. To be very blunt, I found Steven Woolcott to be rude, unaccommodating, moody and obnoxious. In fact he has no idea what "customer service" means. In his brochure he mentions being "spoilt" at Kabaira Dive Rabaul, you are lucky if you get a fresh towel!

I spoke with Steven about some of the shortcomings of our visit after the first week. I was very surprised at his response to my comments, and feel that some of the more pertinent comments should be published.

Steven claimed “He didn’t really care if people came back to Kabaira or not”. He stated “that customers who stayed longer than a few days were very painful as he didn’t get any time off. Likewise, he claimed it was very difficult to maintain a consistent level of service when people stayed for longer durations”. He then stated that “What Kabaira was all about is sharing his lifestyle with others, and he was not interested in making money or return visits, but wanted just enough money to support himself, girlfriend and family”.

If this is Steven’s attitude, then no wonder Kabaira Dive Rabaul is falling apart at the seams.

### **Kabaira Dive’s Website (Please read website update further down page – Feb 2007)**

This particularly perturbs me, as Steven is blatantly embellishing the truth to almost lying about Kabaira Dive and Lodge. The information on the website is not accurate and does not provide an accurate representation of Kabaira.

It states on the website that Kabaira is located within 2 acres of landscaped gardens and that accommodation is in a beach house. This is not correct. The property is mostly covered in disused junk such as old shipping containers, wrecked vehicles, disused boats, old engines and assorted other rubbish. The sandy beach at the front of the property is suffering major erosion and once again it is covered in disused metal frames from boat trailers, old engine blocks, car pieces, sand bags and used batteries. It is not a pristine beautiful sandy beach as the website suggests.

The beach house they refer to is an old plantation house which is run down and offers basic amenities such as one shared bathroom (toilet and shower), an old sofa and some lounge chairs. The mattresses and pillows are old and sheets often threadbare. The standard of accommodation should be reflected in the accommodation price, and no matter that how much you pay for accommodation, it should always be clean.

The website mentions fantastic food that will tantalise your taste buds. This is incorrect. The cook is a 17 year old boy who is the brother of Steven’s girlfriend. He has absolutely no cooking experience and he doesn’t even like cooking. Therefore, the food is not his fault. The advertising brochure mentions “a variety of European, Chinese and Local cuisine” Well, cuisine is stretching the truth, most of the meals were bland, something you would expect from a low-grade restaurant.

The website also suggests tours of cultural and historic interest. Once again, this is not quite correct. If you are lucky enough that a vehicle works when you want to go on your land tour, you will be disappointed at the lack of knowledge about the local culture and history. Other than basic information that you can read in a travel brochure or on the Internet, little else will be mentioned.

The website also suggests that you may see humpback whales, killer whales, birds and bird wing butterflies. Whilst you may see these creatures, it is highly unlikely, and you will be hard pressed to be able to get to the location because of vehicles not working or it is too much of an inconvenience.

To Steven's credit, he has managed to produce a website that really entices you to visit Kabaira Dive – it's a pity the information does not reflect the truth, and once you are located at Kabaira, you cannot leave as you are totally dependant on Steven for everything as Kabaira is quite isolated without transport. Read and treat the information provided in the website as "advertising material".

#### WEBPAGE UPDATE February 2007

**I note that the website has been completely overhauled since this report was published. The new website is very good and an accurate and true reflection of the diving offered by Kabaira Dive. It's good to see that Steven has corrected the information on the site and published a new website.**

The field notes below were compiled by Jolanda and most of the issues raised can be rectified at little or no cost. There is absolutely no excuse. It is a pity as the area is beautiful, but why visit if every time you want to see some of the beauty you are told it isn't possible for whatever reason.

An operator has to supply more than just a nice location. Lyn and Steven are deluding themselves if they believe location and marketing is all that is needed for a successful dive resort.

Jolanda has decided she will not to use this operator again. I on the other hand may return to Kabaira, but only if Steven and Lyn lift their game and I'm told about it. If you wish to dive the New Britain area, I would suggest visiting Walindi Plantation (good operator with consistent high standards) or make contact with Ropopo Plantation Resort. Kavieng is also quite close to Rabaul and provides similar diving. I no longer recommend Kabaira Dive (unless improvements are made and attitude altered).

#### FIELD NOTES (notes compiled by diving partner Jolanda Antkowicz)

##### Accommodation / Housekeeping Issues

- Bathroom not clean on arrival and not cleaned for 2 weeks. Toilet smelt like a public urinal. Cleaned bathroom myself having found a mop and disinfectant spray.
- A vase had stood in the bathroom so long that mosquito larvae were in the water.
- No soap provided – except for dirty bit found on the bathroom floor. Had to ask for soap.
- Beds not were not made. Sheets changed 3 times in 3 weeks. The last time the day before we left??
- Towels not changed – had to repeatedly ask staff for fresh towels.

- No where to hang wet towels after shower – need to be able to hang towels and cloths indoors as it rains almost every day and there is only limited space to dry clothes.
- No insect repellent offered – had to ask and took 3 days to arrive.
- No offer of mosquito coils – had to ask and only one provided on first night. Luckily we bought our own as there are numerous gaps in the walls of the plantation house which allow access to mosquitos.
- Room has no shelves or hooks for luggage, equipment or clothing. Only one small table in room. Found an old bench in the dining area, which we carried into our room to keep gear off floor.
- Floor in plantation house cleaned once in 3 weeks. The day before we left??
- Rats in the ceiling, although I didn't really mind this (they need to live somewhere).
- Toilet wouldn't flush. I reported this, but it was never repaired. I repaired the flush problem with tools borrowed from their toolkit.
- The plantation house has been altered. The verandah, which was a cool area away from the midday heat, has been closed in and made into three additional rooms. These rooms are very small and quite hot and stuffy during hot weather, despite small fans being provided (which do not work all the time),

### Diving / Photography Issues

- No plastic crates for washing dive gear. Only one aluminium tub that scratched camera equipment and regulators. Only room for one diver to wash gear at a time.
- Dive equipment cleaning area is slimy and very slippery; Jolanda fell and cut her leg and foot. Requested band aids, which were left on the dining table that evening. No concern shown that someone might have injured themselves self on their property.
- No designated area to dry dive gear. There is a rusty water tower which offers limited space. Rusty bits of metal have been welded to the tower structure to make hooks. This was Steven's idea of expanding the cleaning area. Your gear can get damaged easily and the area is not protected from the sun. Very limited space to store gear out of sun. Not enough room for more that a couple people at a time in gear cleaning area.
- Found discarded broken plastic shelves lying around the yard and made makeshift drying area so equipment would not need to lie on concrete and be further scratched.
- No dive master kit, had to improvise with own tools brought from Australia to adjust equipment. I asked for some very basic items (cord tie for regulator mouthpiece) but

was told that one was not available and it was not Kabaira Dive's responsibility to supply spare parts.

- No bucket of fresh water on dive boat to wash camera after the dive. Asked for extra water to be carried to wash camera, however staff forgot most of the time. Constant reminders were necessary.
- No table or other area to set up camera equipment, recharge batteries etc. I set up, cleaned and maintained my camera on the dirty floor of the plantation house.
- Need to bring own power board and surge protector. The powerboards which were at Kabaira have since gone missing or are broken. Asked why one wasn't provided, I was told it's too expensive and they only provide the diving, not photographic services.
- No emergency equipment carried on the boat. It was stored on the shelf in the store room.
- Ladder on boat rusty and dangerous (no maintenance) – could result in head injury.
- The larger outboard engine was broken. It had been broken for three weeks as they could not afford to repair the engine. Consequently, the dive boat was underpowered and travel times to dive sites were often 40 minutes plus. Couldn't do 3 dives per day as planned.
- No auxiliary engine was carried on the boat. Staff often joked that on earlier trips the engine had stopped working, and they had to paddle back to Kabaira or motor back in reverse.
- The engine used was not designed for the type of boat. The Yamaha 60 HP is a short leg and a long leg design is required. The result is that the boat often cavitated with loss of power and speed. This meant longer travel times to dive sites.
- Dive guide inexperienced and didn't know location of some dive sites. Guide lead us in the wrong direction on several dives. He admitted his mistake on surfacing.
- Steven accompanied us on a few dives and we both wondered why he bothered. He made no attempt to point out any marine life, and spent most of the dive taking photographs with his camera, or swimming at the edge of our visibility. I have no idea why he did this, but can only assume he did not want to interact with us, or perhaps thought we wanted to be left alone. Likewise, Steven rarely said anything to us on the boat after the dive unless I asked a question.
- Organised 2 dives at Pigeon Island but couldn't do second dive. Steven had forgotten about another booking for the boat he had chartered, and the boat had to be back in Rabaul by mid day. This effectively wasted a dive day.

- A dive was planned at John Lau's wharf. However, the day Steven arranged this was Saturday. Children were playing at the wharf jumping into the water. Steven continued with the dive and children jumped on us, grabbed our regulators, kicked our masks off, etc. Visibility was zero as children were stirring up the sea floor by jumping from the wharf. Steven should have known that the weekend was a bad time to arrange this dive (as children are not at school). Despite aborting the dive, Steven insisted he be paid 200 kina for the dive.
- Dive guide didn't know how to operate GPS on boat. This resulted in doing dives on sand and reef areas that were in poor condition. Boat depth sounder did not work for much of the time. I complained four times and Bert fixed the problem which was poor wiring to the battery, but guide still couldn't find dive site.
- Battery failed on boat three days running, causing delays on departure times, effectively not allowing 3 dives per day.
- Staff had little knowledge of tides and currents. Many of the dive were hit and miss depending upon current.
- Mooring buoys are only installed on three reefs. The anchor is used to moor the boat on other reefs. I noted coral damage in several areas. Anchor damage clearly visible on reef e.g. large hole in barrel sponge at Sin Reef (aka Church Reef and Ella Reef).
- Staff not vigilant on the dive boat. Several times I had to yell at them, to get their attention.
- Upon surfacing you have to repeatedly ask for someone to take your camera. (not a problem when Steven is on the boat).
- At the boat after a dive, staff are not ready to grab camera and gear. There is a delay waiting to get your gear on board. OK in passive sea conditions, however, dangerous in currents.
- Staff do not think beyond the last task. No thinking ahead. Several times forgot to turn on O2 when line was at depth.
- Staff not trained in the requirements of a photographer. Several times I had my camera soaking in the aluminium tub, to come back, and find wetsuits thrown in for soaking on top of the camera. This happened continually. No thought whatsoever for the guest.
- Overall problem regarding diving is inconsistency – you must check everything. For example staff continually placed BCD upside down on tank. Sometimes dive gear is carried to boat and set up, while at other times you have to carry and set it up – inconsistency.
- Insufficient fuel on boat to get to chosen dive site as initial site had too much current

(they didn't know the tides) – forgot to fill fuel tank. This occurred on three dives!

## Food

- Breakfast and Dinner served Buffet style.
- Almost no fruit besides paw-paw at breakfast, occasionally banana was available and had pineapple twice. Went to market and bought own bananas.
- On the whole, boring and monotonous food with too much starch, little protein and hardly any greens. It was very obvious that minimal money was been expended on food, as rice and sweet potato was always the main food provided.
- Banana cake was the only food available between dives. The quality of the cake varied depending upon who made it.
- Although biscuits were baked on several occasions we were only offered biscuits twice. Was told that cake is for guests – HELLO!!!.
- When other guests arrived Steven "played" the attentive host in order to make a good impression. We were dropped like hot potatoes and ignored. We were not served lunch that day, although the others were given lunch, tea and coffee.
- Hot water urn is continually turned off to save power. Therefore, you need to turn the urn on after the meal and wait until water heats for tea/coffee.
- Tea and instant coffee available but often no milk. Had to ask for fresh coffee, and then they complained that coffee was expensive!

## Breakfast

- Served paw paw every day for breakfast - no variety. On several occasions Paw paw was old and mushy and shouldn't have been served.
- Breakfast is bread, bread and bread, no vegemite, only cheap jams. (Raspberry Jam made in Malaysia that contained no raspberries!!)
- Milk is powdered, made with water from water tank that had bats roosting in it, so don't have cereal unless can use long life milk. Had to repeated ask for long life milk.
- Eggs were sometimes served, however, this depended on who was in the kitchen. Eggs were scrambled into a either a hard rubbery mess or an inedible sloppy mess, or served as runny omelette's filled with tomato goo.
- Best to ask for plain fried eggs – Jolanda taught the boys how to make fried eggs.
- Jolanda cooked her own food on several occasions.

- No fruit juice.
- Placed jugs of milk on each table even though only 3 guests – waste of milk and no control over time out of fridge (often milk was on the table for 3 hours). Milk should be in one jug on the table in a bowl of ice.

### **Lunch**

- Mostly had sandwiches which were OK. Asked for toasted sandwiches for a bit of variety, but this wasn't possible as the griller is broken – surprise!!.
- Steven served 2 minute noodles for lunch and carried the bowls to the table with his fingers in the bowls, absolutely disgusting hygiene and totally inappropriate food to serve guests.
- Another lunch was flavoured pasta out of a foil pouch . Horrible goo and also totally inappropriate for guests.
- Not served lunch at all on at least 4 days – but charged for it.

### **Dinner**

- Boys made to cook, even though don't know how too and don't want too.
- Every night - rice and mashed ka ka (sweet potato)
- Too much starch – rice, pasta and sweet potato and not enough greens.
- Served fresh fish 5 times in 3 weeks. Twice fresh tuna ruined by being cooked in white sauce. Caught the boys making fried battered tuna YUK!!!! Luckily, Jolanda managed to catch them before it was cooked and instead made teriyaki, tuna and lime.
- On two occasions fresh tuna was caught by some fishing guests. We thought sashimi maybe for dinner. The fish was cleaned, frozen and kept for the family. We were given tinned tuna casserole.
- As we don't eat red meat we had were served lentil pie, canned tuna quiche or just vegetables mixed with noodles (totally pathetic), therefore, were hungry most of the time. Cake was the only in-between meal snack– and there is a limit to how much cake you can eat!

## OTHER

- Taps in the kitchen are not appropriately marked to segregate tank water and groundwater (groundwater is contaminated with faecal colliforms and must not be used for drinking without boiling).
- Kitchen hygiene questionable. Not separate tea towels for dishes/hands. Dishes not always washed and rinsed in hot water. No hand soap in kitchen.
- TV has been removed from the dining area.
- Steve sniffs and snorts through dinner (disgusting!) and sneezed over food on Buffet.
- Went on a day tour to the Baining mountains. Sandwiches were provided for lunch, but no drinks. The food was not kept in a cooled container (“eski”), but left in hot vehicle for several hours. Not offered water or other drinks on the trip. You had to arrange this yourself – drink from the stream.
- Fridge never cold so served warm beer.
- Ran out of bread etc. No contingency planning at all. They should have bread in freezer in case of problems. No excuse for running out of bread as Lyn (Steven’s mother) works at a bakery!
- Rats common in kitchen. Cereal boxes had been eaten by rats. We were not served the cereal, however, it remained in the kitchen uncovered for 4 days.
- Regular power black outs. No matches available to light candle in plantation house. Fortunately, I knew where the matches were kept in the kitchen and where to find another candle. No one came to see if we were OK – I could have slipped in the shower, etc. Not all the staff know how to start the generator.
- Torch batteries thrown off beach when finished with. Beach area littered with junk (broken glass, old boat trailers, car parts etc).
- No reliable transport. Bus keeps breaking down - now has new engine but wheels about to fall off and body totally clapped out. Truck broken down and needs new engine. Lynne’s work car, which is unavailable during working hours Monday to Friday, is the only semi-reliable vehicle.
- Lack of personal hygiene – body odour, dirty t-shirts and not washing hands before handling food.

- Based on experience, there appears to be a pecking order at Kabaira in relation to service, food and almost anything else. The order appears to be – Family first, friends second, first time guests third, returning guests fourth. On several occasions Lyn made coffee for her friend, but didn't offer us coffee even though we were sitting next to them. Just plain rude.
- Garden nice but full of old trucks/boats, discarded furniture etc. Looks like a wrecker's yard. Need to clean up all broken plastics, bottles, etc.
- Last day, no diving due to wait time before flying. Asked Steven if we could go with him to the volcano observatory in the afternoon when he was taking tourists back to their lodgings in Rabaul. His answer was a flat no - it was out of his way!
- Kabaira Dive claim to offer history, culture, diving and land tours! These tours only seem to operate when it is convenient for them.
- Once you are at Kabaira, you are marooned there; besides diving there is nothing to do. You are totally reliant on Steven for transport anywhere!
- Outboard boat engines, boats, cars, trucks, buses, accommodation – everything is run down and in need of constant repair and/or replacement. They do not want to inject money into their operation but still expect guests to pay high rates for the standard of accommodation offered.
- I was very surprised when Steven did not speak to us before or after a dive. Most operators comment on marine life, etc. Steven for the most part said nothing at all, unless it was to the staff.
- Steven is moody, uncouth and immature. He hasn't the slightest idea what customer service means. For most of our stay we were ignored and not offered even a courtesy salutation.
- The entire family has no idea what hospitality means. They appear to be in denial if that can't see a problem in using boats and vehicles that constantly breakdown, or having a junk yard full of rusty wrecked boats and vehicles, and then calling it a resort. As far as they are concerned all that is involved in operating a "resort" is getting people there and once there they will put up with the problems. To bad, if have spent a lot of time and money getting there and have an awful holiday, they've got your money.
- Another aspect that we didn't like was the way Steven treated his staff, ordering them around as if he was a village chieftain. The two staff worked tirelessly from dawn to late in the evening doing everything from boat preparation, dive guiding, tank filling, cooking and washing up. We both felt very sorry for them.

- There appears to be no forward planning and everything is done on the fly with every attempt to save money being made by cutting corners (if it were possible I'm sure Steven would water down the fuel so it could go further). On several occasions, I overheard a staff member asking Steven a question about what to cook. Steven's answer was "do what you normally do – improvise". The result was noodles or tinned fish for a meal.

## END NOTES

I have used a point system from 1 to 10. 10 is perfect whilst 1 is very poor. 5 is average.

Accommodation (**)	3
Food	3-4
Diving Operator (overall opinion as at July 2006)	1
Coral Diversity	5-7
Fish (*)	6-7
Invertebrates	7-8
Cryptic Animals	3-4
Environmental Attitude & Awareness	0
Dive Management & Attitude	0

(\*) Fish life refers to fish abundance and species diversity

(\*\*) Accommodation although basic lacks important items such as gear tables, power boards, shelves, hooks, etc. If these were provided accommodation would be 7.

**NOTE:** - Kabaira Dive's website makes a point of advertising the opportunity to dive with pelagic fish species. Large fish are observed at Kabaira from time to time, however, these sightings are fickle and not common on every dive.