

THE REEF SEEKER



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JOIN US FOR THE 36TH ANNUAL AVALON UNDERWATER CLEANUP

There are a number of things to like about February: (1) the Super Bowl, (2) Valentine's Day, (3) PGA golf tourney at Riviera, (5) Kurt Mendelsohn's birthday, (6) the Oscars, and . . . (7) the annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup. This year the event is happening on Saturday, February 25.

The event usually attracts around 500 divers who get a chance to dive spots that are normally off-limits to diving like the Green Pier (where we'll be), Lover's Cove, and Step Beach. But once a year, we get to splash in at these places and the only caveat is that you agree to hunt for and pick up trash on the bottom.

Especially this year with all the rain we've had as well as the projected rain to come, the Cleanup take on an important role. For those

of you who saw "Finding Nemo" (which I have always considered more of an educational documentary than an animated cartoon), you will recall that the over-riding theme was that all storm drains lead to the ocean. And the serious point is that trash in the ocean is a huge problem.

This is even more so in Avalon where heavy rains essentially flush everything from the hills down the streets and into the harbor. That stuff, in turn, can then wash/drift around the corner and end up in the Underwater Park. So the Cleanup goes a long way mitigating those trash-related problems.

It always amazes me at what is found. And that's also why there are prizes given out for various categories like Weirdest, Smallest, Most Unusual, and whatever else strikes the judges' fancy. (The categories are admittedly a little loosely structured.)

Of course every item found has some sort of a story behind it in how it ended up at the bottom of the ocean and we want to know that tale. The wilder the better. And the story does not necessarily need to stand up to fact-checking. In fact, this will be one instance where embracing "alternative facts" can pay off quite handsomely since the best stories will compete for the highly-coveted

Ken Kurtis Silver-Tongued Devil Award, given for the best BS story behind your find. (I can't imagine WHY they named it after me . . .)

So a good time will be had by all and we'll be doing some good work as well. As usual, Reef Seekers will be taking a group over early Saturday morning. We offer a package deal that includes event registration, *Catalina Express* over and back, taxi transport from the Mole to the Green Pier, and your choice of gear storage post-event or taxi transport to the Park to continue diving.

If you'd like to join our group, just give us a call at 310/652-4990. Cross our palm with \$150 and that'll cover you for all the stuff we mentioned as well as all the fun you can handle. Don't miss out!!!

ONLY ONE SPOT LEFT ON THE FIJI TRIP

Just as an FYI in case you've been thinking about this since I announced the trip Sunday evening, there's now only ONE spot (male-share) left on our Fiji trip November 2-12 aboard the *Fiji Aggressor*. We can only take 10 people - that's the full boat - so that's part of the reason this is filling so quickly. But if you're thinking about this, don't think too long.

THE BEST TRIP EVER (truly)

I do love diving Yap, but I'm REALLY excited about what we have planned for this year. In fact, we think this will be sooooo popular, that we're offering it twice.

We call it "Yap Immersion" because we really want to immerse you in everything that makes Yap such a special place to dive and to visit. The general thought is that it's a 13-day trip with 10 days of diving in Yap. Yap's got Manta Rays, Mandarinfish, sharks, scenic reefs, marvelous macro, historic ties to World War 2, Stone Money, wonderful people, and is just a fabulous place to spend time.

They've also got our partners in crime, Bill Acker and Manta Ray Bay Resort (aka MRB), which is absolutely one of our favorite places to stay. Now granted, there aren't THAT many choices on Yap but MRB would be a top-notch facility no matter where it was. The rooms are lovely and unique, the staff is wonderful (I still marvel at how they learn everyone's name within a day of your arrival), and the location is perfect, being right on the edge of the bay. You simply couldn't possibly ask for a nicer place to spend your non-diving time.

Speaking of diving . . . we will do up to 24 dives that will include manta dives at the cleaning stations, a shark feed, a Mandarinfish dive, macro dives, reef dives, and wall dives. We will also include a Manta ID program (you'll get a PADI specialty card) which will

teach you the ins and outs of manta identification. We'll build on that with what I'm calling "The Manta Project" which is simply that we will track with photos all of the different mantas we see over the course of our time there. (Sometimes we have one at a cleaning station, but sometimes we get seven or eight or more. And without photos to document the different markings, they start to all look alike.) And because a lot of this ID-ing is enhanced by the photos, we'll also be including photo workshops and critiques throughout the week. The best plan is to do the dives on nitrox, which is included in the trip package, and for anyone NOT nitrox-certified, we'll include a NAUI course at no extra charge (other than cost of the materials).

On the non-diving side, we'll take one day off from diving to do a full island tour that will include delving into Yap's role in World War 2, giving you a sense of the history of the people which also includes the unique Stone Money that forms a key part of their culture. On our final day (non-diving to outgas before the plane ride home), there will be a morning kayak tour of the mangroves for those interested,

followed by an afternoon visit to a local village.

You probably all know by now how much I enjoy going to Yap, and I think this will be a fabulous trip. We've scheduled this for July because the winds have died down then and that means that all the dives sites on both sides of the island should be accessible, as well as it should be the time of the calmest waters and the smoothest rides. It will also hopefully mean that we can do some exploratory dives and go to some spots that aren't dove too often, if at all.

Everyone will get a double-occupancy Ocean View room (single supplement available if desired), breakfast daily, all the stuff I just mentioned and more, airport transfers, and crew/staff tips. Not included are lunches and dinners (figure another couple of hundred bucks) and also not included is airfare (generally around \$2,100).

Cost of the "Yap Immersion" package is \$2,995 which I think is a really good deal, especially when you consider everything you're getting. (Of course, I might be a bit prejudiced about this.) The other thing I like - and you will too - is

2017 DIVING VACATIONS

March 17-25 • Bonaire

June 10-17 • Isla Mujeres

July 7-19 • Yap Immersion #1

July 21 - Aug 2 • Yap #2

that we're setting this up as a 12-divers max trip. So no big cattle boats to deal with. And even with 12, we'll likely do it as two boats of 6 most days, with me on one boat and Bill on the other. The goal is to give you a really great and unique experience and find the best diving possible on every given day.

You can choose between Yap Immersion #1 (July 7-19) or #2 (July 21 - August 2). If you've got the time, you can also add on a side trip to Palau or other destinations (like Truk Lagoon) that are in the region. We can help you with those details too.

As of this writing, we have 8 people confirmed for #1 and 6 people confirmed for #2. So we've got room for you. If you have any questions about this (or want to sign up), feel free to contact me directly via e-mail or phone. And since it's early in the year, we can set up an easy monthly payment plan for you if you'd like to spread out the \$2,995.

It's gonna be a great trip, probably our best Yap experience ever. So don't miss out!!!

IS THAT A SAUSAGE IN YOUR POCKET??

You're on a dive having a wonderful time when that little voice inside your head starts telling you that something's amiss, and that's when you realize (because you didn't take the Navigation Class we're offering February 11) that you're not sure where you are, you're not sure which way the boat

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Feb. 2	Veterans Park	••• Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	11	Veterans Park	Navigation (w/one dive)	\$25
Wed.	15	Veterans Park	••• Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	25	<i>Catalina Express</i>	36th Annual Cleanup	\$150
Wed.	Mar. 1	Veterans Park	••• Squid Dive •••	FREE!!!
Wed.	15	Westwood	Photo Workshop	\$25

is, and - because you're also now running low on air - you're going to have to surface and hope for the best.

And when you complete your safety stop, make it to the top, blow up your BC, and start turning in a circle to scan the horizon to spot the boat . . . you realize that the speck that seems a mile away is the vessel to which you'd like to return. And especially if you're down-current, what do you do now?

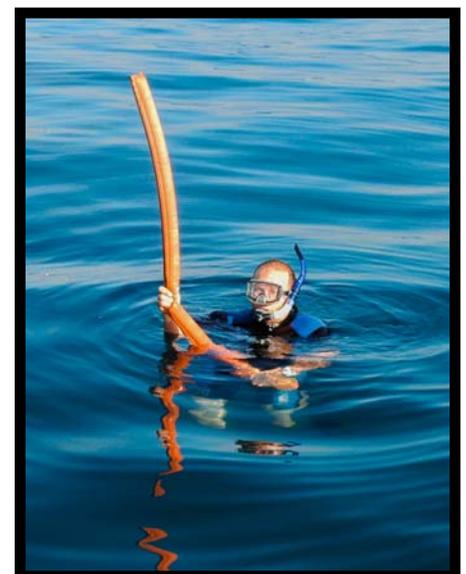
Assuming a kick back to the boat is not an option and that them coming to get you is the only way you'll be back on boata firma, having a safety sausage in your pocket will increase your chances of being spotted and picked up quickly. Safety sausages are inexpensive (some under \$20), easily deployed, and very visible. It makes it much easier to spot you from the boat and track you on the surface while other divers are being retrieved.

Other than drift diving, where we expect you not to come back to the boat, bear in mind that SoCal diving 95% of the time the boat is anchored and it's expected that you will make your way back on your own. But in the hopefully rare instances where you're so far away that getting back on your own is not feasible, you'll be quite happy to have a sausage.

Personally, I carry two, one in each

pocket in my BC. That way, I've always got one sausage that I can grab and another sausage that I can hand the other one off to my buddy, since two sausages will be even more visible than one. On foreign trips where we do a lot of drift diving, I use them frequently. Just makes it easier on the boat guys. In SoCal, I don't think I've ever had to use them. But, since I don't want to be another Drifting Dan, it certainly can't hurt to have it handy.

If you don't have at least one, go to your local dive shop and add it to your gear collection. If your local store doesn't have them or can't get them for you, let me know and I can order them. If the need arises, you'll have it handy so it'll make sense when the dinghy driver comes up to you and says, "Is that a sausage from your pocket and are you happy to see me?"



A SURE THING

Suppose I told you that if you were to invest \$35, your payout would be over \$20,000? You'd have to be crazy not to make that investment, right? And yet, many of you are ignoring this opportunity to turn \$35 into over \$20,000.

According to figures released by D.A.N., the average cost of a medically-necessary evacuation (both dive-related and non-dive related) in 2015 was \$20,675. Most medical insurance plans will not cover that. If you have no other coverage, that's money YOU will have to pay out of your pocket if the need arises. However . . .

If you are simply a D.A.N. mem-

ber, you're covered up to \$100,000 in costs. To be clear, this is simply the regular D.A.N. membership, which costs \$35/year. And to be totally clear, this doesn't cover treatment costs if you need a chamber (that's D.A.N. Dive Accident Insurance which is a separate - but also valuable and inexpensive - policy). But this will getting you out of wherever you are to wherever you need to be to get proper treatment.

A number of years ago, one of our divers was in Europe on a non-diving trip and was riding a municipal bus. The bus came to a sudden stop and, because it was standing-room only, she was thrown forward and broke her back. She couldn't be treated where she was but, because she had a D.A.N.

membership, a call to D.A.N. TravelAssist got her medical evacuation underway and took a LOT of stress off of her family.

If you're not a D.A.N. member, you should become one. And you should also get the dive insurance - just in case - which is available only after you become a D.A.N. member. You can find out more about all of the benefits and opportunities available to you at www.dan.org.



PICTURE PAGE - Fabulous Yap

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2017)



**Leaf
Scorpionfish**



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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



**You
lookin' at me???**



**Nemo's
cousin**



**Sharks
overhead**



**Manta
fly-by**