

THE **REEF** SEEKER



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BACK FROM EASTER ISLAND

One of the things I appreciate most about what I get to do (really, what you all allow me to do) is that I get to travel with you to many unique and wonderful places all over the world. And there's probably no place more unique than Easter Island, 2500 miles west of the Chilean coastline.

We were there for a week in early January - we also ran a trip there in 2011 - and it was really interesting to see how the place has changed in the last eight years. Definitely more tourism (it's increased from 60,000 visitors annually to around 100,000), definitely more traffic, and definitely a need to upgrade their Internet, which EVERYONE complains about. (But to help offset that, they've also got an amazing number of really good restaurants.)

Our diving this time was really good as we had better conditions than we did in 2011. I thought

there were more fish this time than last but that doesn't mean there were shoals and shoals of fish like you might find in the Maldives. As I like to say, its not that there aren't ANY fish, it's just that there aren't MANY fish.

But the viz was be terrific. This is due to a relative lack of plankton in the water. We had one site where we estimate that we had close to 200-foot visibility. And when you looked out into the blue (and you'll see this on some of the SmugMug pictures), it's that magical shade of blue that we all dreamt of when we first learned to dive.

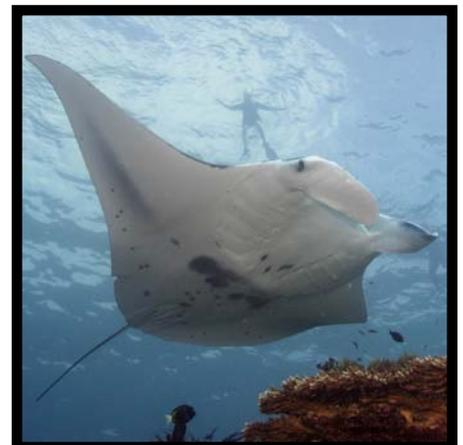
Of course, Easter Island is most famous for its amazing statues, known as Moai. They're in various places around the island and while much is known about them, much is not. Our tour guide again was Josie Nahoe Mulloy, who is the grand-daughter of William Mulloy, the original researcher who started piecing together what this place was all about back in the 50s. So she certainly brings a unique perspective to visiting the various sites around the island.

The trip report and pictures are posted on-line and if you haven't had a chance to review them yet, just go to www.reefseekers.com and you'll find the links toward the top of that page.

Next up: Yap in March. Yahoo!!!

SPEAKING OF YAP . . .

If you're a longtime reader of this monthly missive, you already know Yap is one of my favorite places to go and that I think Manta Ray Bay Resort & Yap Divers are simply outstanding. We're going back again March 11-24 and we can add you at the last-minute if you're interested. This is our extended "Yap Immersion" version which includes all the diving, some workshops (Manta ID, photo, and fish ID), a half-day land tour to get a feel for the local culture, and a lot of amazing animal encounters. Land portion is \$3,895 which includes a fabulous ocean-view room, breakfast daily (they have the BEST bacon in the world), and crew tip. Airfare (on United) is running around \$2,000 but if you have miles, a mileage ticket can be had for as little as 70,000 miles. If you're interested in adding yourself to this adventure, call us at 310/652-4990.





**TSA PRE-CHECK
NOW AT
TOM BRADLEY
INTERNATIONAL**

When we were leaving on the Easter Island trip, I was quite pleased to notice that there's FINALLY a TSA Pre-Check lane at the TBIT at LAX. (It's to the left when you go upstairs for security.) As best I can tell, it just opened in January. Some of the international carriers who are members of the Pre-Check program include AeroMexico, Air Canada, Air France, All Nippon, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Emirates, Ethiad, KLM, Lufthansa, Philippine Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Swiss Air, and Turkish Airlines.

Remember that your boarding pass will need to be marked "TSA Pre-Check" to be allowed to use the faster lane. (It's also means your shoes stay on, your laptop stays in, and you generally go through just the metal detector instead of the full-body scanner.) If you're already enrolled in Pre-Check either directly or through Global Entry, make sure when you make your reservation that you enter your Known Traveler Number. Also bear in mind that the Pre-Check designation only helps you in US airports. Foreign airports don't have such an accommodation.

If you're not already enrolled in the Pre-Check program you can do so starting with an on-line pre-enrollment form. Make sure you

don't have anything that might disqualify you, then you go in (usually to an airport) for an in-person interview, and then you're (usually) approved. It costs \$85 for five years. You can also apply (instead) for Global Entry which, when approved (costs \$100 for five years), includes Pre-Check.

But if you fly, whether domestically, internationally, or both, TSA Pre-Check makes it all much quicker and less painful. Absolutely worth it.



**WASTING DISEASE
STILL A PROBLEM**

A recent study of the decimation of the Sunflower Star population along the west coast has determined that Wasting Disease, which basically causes a sea star to dissolve and die, is the root cause, and that the disease itself may be

affected by ocean warming and climate change. It's estimated that over 99% of the Sunflower Stars in deep waters off of California and Oregon have disappeared.

One of the issues is that Sunflower Stars are a keystone predator species, generally preying on sea urchins. Without the Sunflower Stars, the urchin population is unchecked and that means the urchins start eating the kelp. That in turn produces kelp barrens which then means fish homes are lost, and the fish that sheltered in the kelp either die or move on.

There is some hope that the Sunflower Star can make a recovery, and maybe even relatively quickly. By the same token, in studying 700 trawls in 2016, not a single Sunflower Star was found and in 2018, only one was seen. As mentioned previously, a lot of this may be associated with warming ocean temperatures. They don't think the warming seas caused the outbreak but may have magnified the effects of the impact of the disease, making the stars more susceptible to infection.

I'm fond of the saying, "Nature finds a way" and hopefully that will be the case here too.

2019 DIVING VACATIONS

March 11-24 • Yap Immersion

Mid-May • Bonaire

July 6-22 • Indonesia

August • Isla Mujeres



INDONESIA IN JULY

We are confirmed for our return to dive with our good friends at Murex in Manado, Indonesia (NE Sulawesi). This is where I got the “Opa Gila” nickname that I cherish so much that it’s even on my license plate.

The diving is simply fabulous, offering us a rich combination of both reef and muck diving. The reef dives generally feature vertical walls, fascinating shallows, and very good visibility. The muck sites - which will include near-Murex sites and a day-trip and three dives to the Lembeh Strait - are where you find things like Frogfish, Pygmy Seahorses, Blue-Ringed Octopus, Ghost Pipefish, and many other amazing creatures.

We love staying at Murex. It’s nestled in a wooded area with natural ponds of free-flowing water all around. A few years ago, they moved the main diving area to place right along the shoreline, so breakfast and dinners (lunches are on the boats) are enjoyed with the sea lapping a few feet away. Amazingly pleasant.

It also sounds like they made some infrastructure upgrades since we were last there in 2015 with a revamp of their photo area to now feature individual work stations with charging outlets and it sounds like they’ve added a spa on-site, so you can indulge yourself post-dive. They’ve also got (and they had this previously as well) a nice house reef and - as long as a storm doesn’t rip it out - they even in-

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	Feb. 9	Redondo	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Thu.	14	Redondo	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	23	Catalina Express	38th Avalon U/W Cleanup	\$150
Wed.	27	- CLASS -	- NAUI NITROX -	\$75
Sun.	Mar. 3	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Sat.	9	Aqrm of Pacific	Divers Day	FREE!!!
Thu.	Apr. 4	Redondo	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE!!!

stalled some guidelines to create an underwater trail so it’s easy to navigate around and find the highlights of the local reef.

Because of the air sked in and out of Manado, this is an extended trip. Departure date from LAX is July 6 and we’ll return on July 17. We’ll likely take one of the new Singapore Air nonstops between LAX and SIN which means we no longer have to overnight in Singapore. That will give us nine nights at the Murex and eight full days of 3-tank dives. Veteran ace dive guide Basrah Tan (aided by Hanny Katingide and others) will shepherd us along. There’s also an option each day to do a late afternoon unguided shore dive on the house reef.

Land portion for this adventure is \$2,995 and that includes airport transfers, double-occupancy room, all meals, all diving, and crew/staff tip. (Single supplement is available and adds another \$325.) Airfare on Singapore Air is running around \$1,700 for Economy (which might require a layover) and \$2,500 for Premium Economy (which are the non-stops). Business is also available for just under \$5,000.

We truly LOVE diving this area of the world as there are lots of amazing things to see and everyone at Murex is incredibly friendly and helpful. Give us a call at 310/652-4990 for more info or to sign up.

MUSCLE MEMORY

We were discussing today what happens when people run out of air. I opined that it’s not so much that you do what you’re taught, but that you do what you’ve practiced recently.

It may have been MANY years since you last did an out-of-air drill. So what would happen if you ran out of air?

I have long advocated that every day, before the first dive, you should discuss what your out-of-air options and responses are, and then practice them on the surface before your first descent.

A few years ago in the Maldives, at dusk and about 50 feet deep (we were watching Nurse Sharks), I heard a BANG!!! And I instinctively knew that (1) It was a regulator hose, and (2) I immediately grabbed my octopus. Turns out it was someone next to me, I gave him my octo, we were able to actually fix the hose (it had come unscrewed) underwater, the reg worked again, and we switched back. But its only because I practice OOA drills with students and others that this is an automatic response for me.

So I encourage you to build the same thought into your dive plan the next time you go out. Practice builds muscle memory and the life you save might be your own.



AVALON CLEANUP

Save the date: Saturday, February 23. That's when the 38th annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup will take place. Net proceeds from the event are split evenly between the Wrigley Institute Catalina Conservation Divers and the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber.

Reef Seekers has supported this event pretty much from its inception. And we're quite happy to be ensconced once again at our usual

location of the Green Pier, where all kinds of goodies and treasure have been found over the years. This event is not only fun, but a great way to support the City of Avalon, as cleaning the harbor bottom (there are also sites at Step Beach and the breakwater back-side at the UW Park) provides a very good community service.

We'll be leaving on the 6AM (ugh!!!) *Catalina Express* out of Long Beach. Much as I really hate the o-dark-thirty departure, the nice thing is that we're in place by 7:30 or so and that gives us plenty of time to not only socialize, but also to go have a bit of breakfast. The general briefing for the event is at 9:00AM and the horn sounds to start the dive at 9:30. You've got to be out of the water by

11:00AM. After that, you can decide to either have your gear stored for the afternoon, or you can hop in a taxi and go over to the UW Park to continue diving. The trash awards and raffle prizes are handed out on the Main Stage starting at 1PM and once that's over, we'll have the annual Reef Seekers Miniature Golf Tournament at Golf Gardens. (If you've never played there, it's a really great miniature golf course. There's a par 6 and it's a TOUGH par 6.) We'll take a 6PM boat back to Long Beach.

If you'd like to sign up and dive with us, call us at 310/652-4990. \$150 covers you for registration, boat, taxi, gear storage or Park transport, and all the fun you can handle. This is a really great event and we hope to see you there.

PICTURE PAGE - Easter Island 2019

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2019)



The quarry at Rano Raraku



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Six Moai at Anakena



Half-barred Wrasse (endemic)



The elusive Orangehead PgymyAngelfish



Easter Island Damsel fish (endemic)