

THE REEF SEEKER



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YAP TRIP MINI-REPORT

I'll start with the caveat: I love diving Yap so maybe I'm prejudiced and don't have the proper perspective. (But I think that after having two groups here, I've got 12 converts to my way of thinking.) This isn't the full trip report, which will be forthcoming (hopefully) later this week along with pictures, but is just a bunch of random impressions as I'm sitting here in my room at Manta Ray Bay Resort.

I think the thing that always impresses me the most about Yap is the friendliness of the people. Now, granted, when you come to any commercial establishment, you hope that their customer service training is such that they'll try to take care of you. But it seems to go further than that in Yap. EVERYONE is friendly.

And it's even more so at the resort. I've been coming here since 2002 so it's not unusual that they know me and greet me by name. (Plus a lot of their staff have been here

forever, as there's relatively little turnover.) But what's really special is they make an effort to learn EVERYONE'S name and by the end of day one, they're greeting you by name each time they see you. (And fortunately, they all wear name tags so if your name recognition isn't as good as theirs, there's a cheat.) This is even more amazing when you realize that many people only come here for three or four days, on their way to Palau or Chuuk or somewhere like that, and new people appear every Wednesday morning and Sunday morning. So the guest turnover, unlike the staff turnover, is relatively high.

I also really like the physical plant at Manta Ray Bay (MRB). I've often called this the nicest dive-dedicated hotel I've ever stayed in (and perhaps in the world) and that hasn't changed. We had our usual suite of rooms (306, 307, 308, & 309 – in the "Ken Kurtis Wing") plus a few others. Also, because it's a slow time of the year for them, the deal I have with owner Bill Sacker is that we can put a single person in a room without a single supplement. So everyone had a room to themselves.

The rooms are really large, ranging from roughly 350-450 square feet, with either a king bed or two queens, table and chairs, armoire, dresser, sink/mirror separate from

the bathroom (with a shower – no tub), and the rooms all have balconies overlooking the bay (except for 309). Really nice.

The boats are quite fast (25-30mph) and functional. They're certainly not luxurious but they definitely get the job done. And there are dry fluffy towels on board, along with bananas, hot tea, and homemade bread for between dives. Plus they have a "VIP" service at no charge where you simply show them your gear the first day, and each day thereafter they load it on the boat for you and take it off and rinse it after the day is done.

So to me, the whole place is a class act and the way a dive resort SHOULD be run. It's not always perfect, but they're always trying to do their best to make sure you maximize your enjoyment.

Plus the diving's pretty good too. We've seen mantas up close and personal, sharks up close and personal, plenty of very healthy hard coral reefs, hundreds of species of fish, turtles, nudibranchs, and even some dolphins under the bow of the boat, plus one day we had some small pilot whales in-between dive sites.

So if Yap's not on your list, it absolutely should be. As they like to say here, it takes a little time to get here, but it's time well spent. I agree wholeheartedly.



POINTING FINGERS AFTER A DIVER'S DEATH

I get it that we live in a judgmental society. I get it that as humans, we have a need to understand what the mechanics are when things go wrong and that means we tend to quickly point fingers of blame, but many times point at things that are really blameless.

It seems that any time a diver dies, among the first things people want to know is, "What boat were they on?" My question back is usually, "What difference does it make if the accident happened underwater?" To me, pointing the finger of blame at the mode of transportation makes about as much sense as saying, "They took the 405 in their Ford to get there so the 405 and Ford are responsible for their death." There's simply no connection.

I've studied literally hundreds of diver death over the years, both through DAN annual reports and individual accidents here in SoCal. I can't recall a single one where (at least in my professional opinion) the boat was the cause of the accident. Just because a commercial dive boat takes someone somewhere and then an accident happens, it doesn't make the boat the cause of the accident.

In a non-peer-reviewed study I did years ago of DAN reports, I con-

clude that 69% of the time, diving deaths are due to diver error, with out of air being a huge factor. So please explain to me what a boat on the surface waiting for divers to return has to do with someone not watching their gauge 50 feet below and sucking their tank dry. I simply don't see the connection.

The other side of this that regular divers don't see is that it's a numbers game. Every boat captain I know feels that some day, it could be their turn to get the careless diver who does something wrong and then it all goes to hell in a handbasket. We know that we average about 5 deaths annually in L.A. County. We know that 3 or 4 of them are going to happen from a boat. We know that 2 or 3 of them will be a commercial dive charter (as opposed to a privately-owned boat). And the point is that the more charters you run, the more likely it is that it will be "your turn" some day.

Here's an extreme way to look at it. Suppose there was only one charter dive boat in L.A. and that everyone who did a commercial boat dive would then have to dive on that boat. It would stand to reason that, if the number of deaths stayed the same, that boat would account for every one of them.

Would that make it a dangerous boat? No. It would simply be the way the numbers played out.

There are certainly possibilities of boats doing things wrong, the most obvious of which would be running over a diver. In that case, absolutely blame the boat and name it since it would seem like they weren't paying attention. A few years ago I was asked to be a defense expert in such a case where a boat in Florida ran over and killed a diver. The lawyer who was soliciting me said, "We did a toxicology test on the dead diver and it turns out he was on cocaine at the time of his death." I replied, "So you're telling me that the defense you want me to support is that their guy was hopped up on drugs so our guy has a right to run him over? I don't think so."

So it's not that boats or captains or instructors or buddies are always blameless. But that's usually the case. And it would be nice for once to see the dive community ask questions – they certainly deserve to be answered publicly – but to save the blame game for until all the facts are in and there's a clearer picture about what actually happened.

End of rant.

2017 DIVING VACATIONS

September 1-6 • Great Whites

November 2-14 • Fiji

WHERE TO GO IN 2018???



WHAT'S UP WITH YELLOW?

During one of our Yap dives, my eye was caught by a juvy tang who was bright yellow. And it got me to thinking: He stood out like a sore thumb, so wouldn't being yellow be a bad thing, because it might make you a more noticeable target? And as I looked around the reef, I realized there are a LOT of fish, certainly here in the tropics, that are not only yellow, but a bright yellow. And you would think that would be like a death sentence because it's basically waving a flag for every predator saying, "Over here!!! Free yellow meal!!!"

Or . . .

Then I got to thinking about nudibranchs. Most of them are fairly brightly-colored. (Think of the Spanish Shawl in SoCal waters.) The thinking is that the bright coloring, especially because they don't have a shell and they're more vulnerable, says to predators, "I don't taste good so you should look elsewhere."

We see a similar thing in juvies. Many times, they're very brightly-colored. A good local example is the Garibaldi. When it's an itsy-bitsy yearling, it's almost all iridescent blue with a hint of bright orange. As it grows older, the blue becomes iridescent blue spots. The thinking here is similar, that the

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

Working on it.

Really.

I promise.

bright coloration is a signal to predators that this is a juvy and should be left alone.

So I was wondering if perhaps yellow coloration on the reef works in the same fashion and that it's more of a deterrent than an invitation. Because there sure is a lot of it and if it made fish more vulnerable, you'd think that evolution would weed out the color with the yellow easily-seen fish getting eaten and the unyellow not-easily-seen ones surviving and breeding.

I don't have an answer here, I'm just musing. It all simply strikes me as a bit odd and out of character. Like many things in nature, it's puzzling. But if anyone has some insight into this, I'd love to hear about it.

2018 TRIPS

I'm starting to think about trips for next year and would like some more input. Obviously, I'd like to go to places that YOU would like to go to.

I don't have any of the timing worked out yet but I'd like to try for Indonesia (Murex in Manado, Sulawesi) again, as well as Yap

(perhaps another version of the 10-day Yap Immersion), and maybe Isla Mujeres again for the Whale Sharks. I'm still not comfortable with the consistency of the current administration's Cuba policies and am fearful of access suddenly being curtailed so I'm afraid "Scuba Cuba" will not be one of the 2018 options.

Scheduling these trips is always a toss-up between going back to places we've been where they know us and take good care of us (and we know the best spots to dive) or doing new things that are interesting because we've never done them before. I usually aim for a mix of the two so am certainly open to suggestions for new destinations.

I'm also open to "new" places we haven't been in a while. Easter Island certainly comes to mind as do Belize and Roatan.

So give some thought as to what works for your interest level as well as your time available and budget and let me know. Of course, you can also just send me a blank check and say "Take me somewhere" and then I'll let you know the time and place. Then again, maybe that's MY dream way of planning travel.

REPORT FROM THE AVALON U/W PARK

Reef Check recently went over to survey conditions at the Avalon Underwater Park. One of the participants was Susy Horowitz, who sent us these comments:

“All the kelp is back. And tons of Black Sea Bass. I saw 2-3 but one person saw 8. I ran into Erika Ladd (Ocean Adventures) who said that she saw 9 on one dive yesterday and 12 on one dive last week!

“I’ve never seen so many Rainbow Scorpionfish. I didn’t find any blennies (probably didn’t know where to look) but also saw a Zebra Goby and a Guadalupe Cardinalfish as well as two types of shrimp. And the water temperature was between 69 and 72! Be-

low the thermocline it was a freezing 64 (lol).”

So there’s a bunch of good reasons to hop on over to Avalon and dive the Park. Also shows how quickly things can get nice again in a Marine Protected Area (MPA).



LAPTOP UPDATE

As you likely know, the TSA announced last month that there would be new “enhanced” screening techniques for laptops that were in carry-on bags. But they didn’t really specify exactly what “en-

hanced” meant except to say it would be “better.”

Our first Yap group got a chance to find out as they were flying from Yap to Guam, which is technically a U.S. port-of-entry, and then from Guam to Honolulu. For non-TSA PreCheck passengers, you’re still going to have to remove your laptop from the bag so nothing’s really changed. As best I can tell, the most any PreCheck people had to do was also remove the laptop from their bag and send it through separately.

So hopefully this is much ado about nothing and personally, I’m quite relieved they didn’t choose to go with a total ban of laptops in the passenger cabin. We’ll keep you posted if we become aware of any further changes in procedures.

PICTURE PAGE - Yap, 2017

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2017)

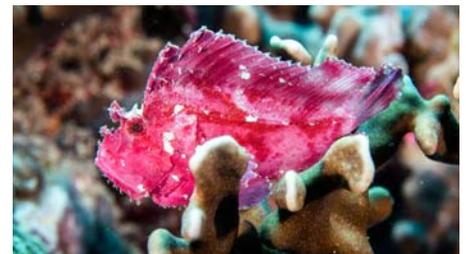


**Many, many, many
Anemonefish**



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**Bright pink
Leaf Scorpionfish**



**Bluefin
Trevally**



**Flame
Angelfish**



**Requisite
Stone Money shot**