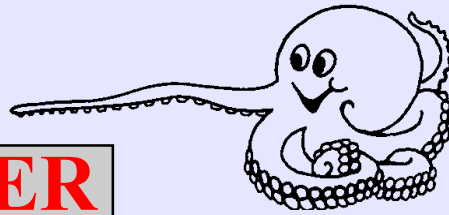


THE REEF SEEKER



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September - 2024



RETURN TO EASTER ISLAND

I'm trying to remember the first time I heard about Easter Island. I would guess that I first learned of the place, more correctly called Rapa Nui, when reading something by Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl (you may know him better from the Kon-Tiki expedition) who organized one of the first archeological studies of the area in 1955.

Regardless of how I found out, it was always something I wanted to see and in 2011 I finally made it there to not only experience the magnificence of the giant carved statues known as moai that dot the island, but to explore the diving opportunities as well. We went back in 2019 and we're going back again in 2025. Wanna come along?

There are plenty of reasons, both above and below the water, to visit Easter Island. Above the water,

you have the magnificent and famous moai (giant carved heads, many with bodies too) all over the island. There's still plenty that isn't known about them but we'll be joined by my friend and expert guide Josie Nahoe Mulloy, whose grandfather (William Mulloy) oversaw the major excavations and restorations of the moai once Heyerdahl left. Josie's got some great info including stories about what her grandfather thought that subsequent research has proved wrong and which start with, "Grandpa didn't get this part right."

We'll do three half-days of touring with Josie. We usually schedule those for the afternoons, so we dive in the morning, take a break for lunch, and then do a 4-6 hour tour which is a combination of riding around in a van to some of the spots and then walking around once we're there. Sundown isn't until around 8:30PM that time of the year so we'll have plenty of light and opportunities to see the moai up close and personal, as well as get background from Josie on what the current thinking is on how they came to be.

There are close to 1,000 moai spread out all over the island (which isn't all that big) in various states of disrepair or restoration. We will visit all of the major restoration sites as well as do a trip to the Orongo volcano, which was

the center of the Birdman phase of Rapa Nui.

But from a touring standpoint, we save the best for last. That would be Rano Raraku which is the volcano (dormant) where most of the carving took place. There are still almost 400 moai there in various stages of completion. It's a fascinating place to walk around. Then we'll go to nearby Tonjarki where there are 15 of the moai, all lined up in a row with their backs to the ocean. Truly spectacular.

And while not known for diving, Rapa Nui has some pretty interesting underwater sights to see as well. Yes, there's an underwater moai but it's fake. (We'll dive it anyhow.) It was used as a prop in a movie that was shot in 1994 (produced by Kevin Costner) called *Rapa Nui*.

Because Rapa Nui is one of the most isolated inhabited islands in the world, it presents some unique challenges and opportunities for ocean life. One thing you'll notice is a fairly extensive and thriving low-profile hard coral reefs around the island. But you won't see a ton of fish like you might expect around a coral location. This is because, due to its isolation, Rapa Nui has the least amount of plankton in the water compared to similar islands. Less plankton means it's harder for the smaller fish to

find something to eat and that affects the entire food chain. But it also means that the water can be amazingly clear – due to less plankton – and visibility of 200 feet is not uncommon.

The other thing about the fish is that 25% of them, about the same percentage as you'd find in Hawaii, are endemic to the island, which means that they're found nowhere else in the world. These include Easter Island Damselfish, Easter Island Butterflyfish, Nazca Bigeye, Dwarf Angelfish, some wrasses, and more. And we will do our best to find every one of them for you, including the tiny and elusive Easter Island Pufferfish that likes to hide in dark crevices or lava tubes.

The overall dive plan is to do 11 dives with Orca Diving Center while we're there. The usual sked is to go out around 9AM, take a break and do the second dive around 11AM (all the sites are fairly close), break for lunch, and then either do an afternoon dive or a land tour with Josie. And from a water temperature standpoint, we're timing this right because March is usually peak water temperature there, with temps expected to be in the mid-70s or maybe even a bit higher.

So this is truly an adventure to a place that's not only quite historical – it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site – but also certainly off the beaten path. We'll fly into Santiago, Chile (11 hours from LAX), have about a 2-hour layover, and then it's a little over 5 hours out to Easter Island. Base airfare on LATAM is running around \$1,500 and when you add in seat charges and baggage fees, you'll be at the upper end of \$1,900.

(That's for Economy. Business was \$6,100 to \$7,800).

I'm still working on the pricing for the diving, hotel, and land tours, which will hopefully come in around \$2,900 or so. (We'll also be including tips and airport transfers.) We'll stay in the same hotel we've used before which is a short walk from the dive center and the harbor. Breakfast is included each day but we're on our own for lunch and dinner. (Amazingly, there are a LOT of good restaurants on the island and many within a short walk from the hotel.)

One necessity, based on the initial interest from people who have called or e-mailed me, is that we're going to do this as two groups in back-to-back weeks. Group size will be limited to 12 people overall (8 divers max + non-divers). Group 1 is March 1 (leaving LAX – arriving Rapa Nui March 2) to March 9 (leaving Easter Island, arriving home Monday morning). Group 2 is March 8 (leaving LAX – arriving March 9) to March 15 (leaving Easter Island, arriving home Sunday morning). Everyone will get the same number of dives and tours but Group 1 is actually a day longer because of Josie's sked

and when I can schedule the time with her. So there might be a slight price difference between the two groups due to the extra hotel night that will be needed (but you also have an extra day on the island).

At this point, if you've already let me know you're interested, I've got you on my list. (If you have a preference for Group 1 vs. Group 2, let me know.) Because of the way we do the diving and with the land tours as well, this is also a great trip to a very unique place for a non-diver as well as a diver. There may be some snorkeling opportunities and the dive center also offers a "Try Diving" experience for non-certified divers that they refer to as "Scuba Baptism." So that's an option as well for the non-diver.

This is going to be a unique and fascinating trip, one that will literally create memories that will last you a lifetime. Keep an eye out for final details and once I get those, let me know that you're ready to go and we'll make it all happen.



2024-2025 DIVING VACATIONS

September 9-22 • Yap

November 1-11 • Palau

March 1-9 • Easter Island #1

March 8-15 • Easter Island #2



YAPPING

I had a realization hit me the other day: “Yikes!!! We’re leaving for Yap in a little over a week!!”

Our Yap trip is scheduled for September 8-22. If you’re a regular reader of all things Reef Seekers, you know how much I love diving in that part of the world. (And we’ll be heading for Palau in November.) How can you NOT love a place that puts huge manta rays a few inches over your head plus has sharks, daily mating Mandarinfish, vertical coral walls full of all kinds of interesting creatures, and Stone Money?

As usual, I’ll be posting daily updates – our Daily Top 10 pix – on the Reef Seekers and Ken Kurtis FaceBook pages. So if you’d like to join us vicariously, be sure to keep an eye out for those.

Although the group will be departing Yap on September 22, I will be continuing on my own to the Philippines and specifically to Atlantis Resort in Dumaguete. This is a special by-invitation trip for a group of photographers and while I stayed at Atlantis Dumaguete four years ago on a different type of scouting trip, we were only there for three days so it was a bit rush-rush. This time, I’ll have 10 diving days so can more thoroughly explore (and enjoy) the area.

And, like with Yap, I’ll be posting Daily Top 10 pix on FaceBook. Dumaguete is more known for

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Sept. 5	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	FREE
Sat.	7	Redondo/Vets	Navigation	35
Wed.	Oct. 9	--- CLASS ---	--- Tables & Computers ---	35
Sat.	12	Redondo/Vets	Taming Surf Entries	FREE
Wed.	16	Catalina Express	Avalon Underwater Park	180
Thu.	24	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	35
Wed.	Nov. 13	--- CLASS ---	--- Photo Workshop ---	35
Sat.	16	Redondo/Vets	Beach Diving	35

macro so hopefully I’ll be able to show you creatures weird and small. There’s also a nearby island with some really nice coral reefs and there’s even some Whale Shark activity in the area so we’ll see what’s what. (Nothing like setting up for macro and having a Whale Shark swim by.)

And if in reading about these trips you find yourself thinking, “I really wish I could do a trip with Reef Seekers,” check out your 2025 calendar and see if you can work us in. As just mentioned, we’ve got Easter Island in March and will most likely go back to Roatan in July. I’m undecided at the moment as to whether or not we’ll do a trip in May (we usually travel in the odd-numbered months) so keep your eyes peeled.

ORCAS

We’ve got Orcas in the house!!! (Well, if “the house” is near San Miguel Island.) But earlier this week, a pod of about fifteen of them were spotted as they were (successfully) hunting a large Elephant Seal out in the open water. There’s some pretty dramatic video posted by Pacific Offshore Expeditions (<https://www.facebook.com/reel/3806376352950144>) as well as some drone footage from Eli Parnes-Katz (<https://>

www.facebook.com/eli.parneskatz/videos/1801139770412213).



THAT TIME OF THE YEAR

We’ve mentioned a couple of times how this time of the year represents some of the best diving as the water temps peak sometime end-of-September-start-of-October and we can get great visibility, approaching 100 feet. But this is also a time of the year – as the Orca story indicates – when we start to get some animals migrating through our waters.

The Gray Whale migration will start soon as they head south to Mexico, but also be on the lookout for Humpbacks, Fin Whales, and others. There were reports a week or so ago of turtles being spotted around Catalina, also not unusual for this time of the year. So whether you’re above or below the water, keep your eyes peeled because you might be in for a special treat.

DRIFTING AWAY

I read (yet another) story last week of a couple who drifted away from their dive boat. I'm not suggesting it was their fault as there were currents in the area and sometimes drift happens. This time, they drifted for 39 hours in the Gulf of Mexico before they were spotted by a USGC helicopter and picked up by a rescue boat. How did they get the attention of the chopper? They used their dive lights.

And it underscores how important it is for you to always carry SOME sort of signaling or location device with you anytime you dive, especially in areas where you could drift away from your boat or exit point.

There are GPS devices like Nautilus Lifeline or Garmins that are specifically designed for this. And there are other makes/model of locator beacons. The idea is that they send out a

radio signal that allows rescuers to pinpoint your location.

There are also surface marker buoys (SMBs) that can be used to attract attention. There are noisemaking devices like DiveAlert. If you're carrying a camera, your flash may have a setting for "strobe" that emits a strong flash at regular intervals. And then there are dive lights.

I always carry at least two with me: a small Underwater Kinetics SL4 in my BC pocket and an Orca Torch D570-GL clipped to my BC. Either one can be used for signaling, especially if it's starting to get dark.

Then there are signaling mirrors. DAN sells one (with instructions for use on the back) for \$7. West Marine has one that comes with a lanyard and whistle for \$10. Hopefully you feel your safety is worth \$7-10.

When all else fails – or you didn't

equip yourself with a signaling device – use your fins. A fin held high in the air and waved around can attract attention. Likewise, take your fins (assuming you can see a rescue vessel) and start making big splashes in the water. Boat people are intuitively attuned to notice splashing water as that indicates some sort of fish activity. Use that to your advantage.

And most of all, think about all of this ahead of time. (Like maybe right now.) If you drifted away, what are your options? What have you done to ensure that you can be found relatively quickly? As someone (me) who's been in that position (Rangiroa, Tahiti - drifting for 30 minutes), I can tell you it's no picnic. And I could see the rescue boat and had five different signaling devices with me. Make sure that if this ever happens to you, you're well-prepared to minimize the time that you are lost at sea.

PICTURE PAGE - Fish of Easter Island

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2024)



Morwong
(aka Triangle Fish)



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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



Dwarf
Angelfish



Sunset
Wrasse



Easter Island
Pufferfish



Easter Island
Butterflyfish