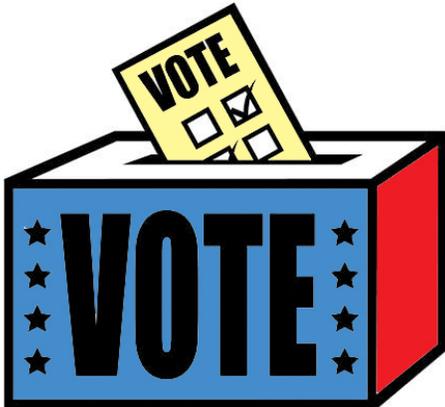


# THE REEF SEEKER



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November - 2018



## BE SURE TO VOTE

I don't care if you're red, blue, or purple (well, I DO care but that's not the point) but please make sure you go out and vote Tuesday so you at least have a shot at getting the government you want. This is a very critical election, no matter what side of the aisle you're on, and if you don't take time to vote, then please don't complain about anything for the next two years because you had your chance.

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## ROATAN 2018 TRIP REPORT

*(This is a slightly truncated version of the full report, which will be on our website later this week.)*

This was our second trip to Roatan, the previous time being in 2013. On that initial trip, it rained just about every day. This time, it only rained for a couple of days, so I guess we're making progress. That

being said, we still had a wonderful time at Anthony's Key resort.

Everyone loved the resort and it really runs efficiently. It's all-inclusive so the schedule each day was pretty much the same: breakfast starting at 7AM, first dive around 8:15AM, second dive at 10:15AM, lunch at Noon, third dive at 2:15PM, back by 4PM, option to shore dive (which no one did – too rough the first few days and too much schlepping if you were really going to do it), dinner at 6PM-ish (they serve until 9PM) and eventually off to bed. The Tuesday and Thursday evening night dive were at 5:35PM, which pushed dinner for those divers back to about to 7:30PM.

The food ranged from OK to excellent. (The ribs at the Wednesday night BBQ were beyond excellent.) Breakfast was an assortment of fruits and breads and then you could order eggs, bacon, toast and other hot items. Lunch and dinner always offered a choice of either soup or salad to start (always different), and then a choice of three entrées, one of which was always a veggie option, followed by dessert. Juices, coffee & hot tea, iced tea, and water are all included. You pay extra for soda and all alcohol.

The bungalows in which we stayed were also outstanding. The De-

luxe rooms are roughly 400 square feet, have a king and a full (double) bed, slightly bigger bathroom, and a private outside deck area over the water, accessible only from the room, but also with a pair of hammocks, a table, and some chairs. For those of us with cameras (remember that I'm a big fan of NOT keeping cameras in air-conditioned rooms overnight due to condensation when you take them back out into the hot, humid air), this private deck gave us a great, secure area in which to work on camera gear and store it overnight.

Laurie & I were in #25 which, along with 26/27/28, have just been refurbished. The rooms are slightly larger and nicer, but the private decks are slightly smaller than the other Key Deluxe rooms.

Another great thing about Anthony's is that the staff is unfailingly pleasant and polite to everyone. And bear in mind that this is really a very large operation. They've got a lot of land, they have (I think) 66 rooms which can handle two people each (so "full" could be as many as 132 divers – there were about 80 there for our week), and this means they've got to have a lot of people to service all of that. And like I said, nary a frowny face amongst the bunch.

Anthony's dive operation is really

dialed in. They've got a bunch of boats: seven 42-footers (which is what we had), four 48s, and a 46-foot snorkel boat. We were assigned our own boat (*Isamar*) with the same DM/Guide (John Carter) and same boat captain (Roos) each day.

The other nice thing they do – and it seems a little “corporate” at first but really works out well – is that the dive shop pre-assigns the dive sites for all the boats each day. What that eliminates is one boat racing another to be the first one on a mooring to dive it. It actually works quite well.

In that same vein, they also pre-assign the two wreck dives, the *Odyssey* and the *Aguila*. Quite frankly, neither one is much to write home about. In fact, John states that the *Odyssey* (which I didn't dive – I was under the weather that day) literally has zero fish on it. And the big attraction of the *Aguila* used to be the large Cuberra Snappers and Black Groupers that hung out by the wreck because the DMs fed them. But they stopped that practice about a year ago so now there's not much there either. Fortunately, both are near decent reefs so you spend 10 minutes on the wreck and the rest of the time go explore the reef.

Speaking of time, the dive sites are all very close to Anthony's. With the exception of Mary's Place (more on that in a bit), the sites are anywhere from a 2-10 minute boat ride away. Dive times were usually pegged at 50 minutes (night dives around 40) but we generally did about an hour with no complaints. And because all of this is close-in, you return to Anthony's after each and every dive. The advantage of that is that if you want

to skip the first dive, you don't screw yourself out of the second, as you would on a 2-tank plan. Or maybe just do the first, skip the second, have lunch, and then come back for the third. Plus, if anyone has a sensitive stomach, you spend your surface interval at the calm dock rather than out on a mooring where you might roll around a little bit. At first the idea of coming back to the dock seems a little silly, but it actually works out quite well.

We did have some minor calamities befall us on the trip. Three of us had minor bouts of turista that caused us to miss some dives. We had one flooded dive computer that we think was due to a screw on the battery door that didn't seat properly. Fortunately, we were able to clean it out, install a new battery, and it was good to go. We had one lost mask when someone was taking it off their head, it slipped out of their hands, bounced off the seat and over the side, and sank into the briny deep. (We were over the drop-off/wall so it's likely a couple of hundred feet deep.) And we had one flooded strobe that was due to a pinched o-ring which you could see peeking out from under the battery door post-

flood. This one was due to poor technique of seating the door (Sea&Sea YS-D2) by holding down two of the three corners of the battery door, and then rotating the locking ring shut. But you're not putting even pressure all the way around that way, the door can tip at an angle, and that's what caused the o-ring to pinch and extrude. A better method is to push straight down on the center of the battery door and hold it, and then rotate the locking ring until you hear it click into place.

We also had some weather calamities in the form of rain, sometimes torrentially so. But it certainly wasn't as bad as in 2013, when it rained just about every day we were there and the viz back then down to about 40 feet was horrible.

The weather also created water conditions Sunday-Tuesday that were less than ideal. There was a lot of particulate in the water and there was a lot of surge. Viz wasn't the greatest either, at maybe 40 feet or so. Things cleared up dramatically on Wednesday, and Thursday & Friday were generally pretty clean and lots of blue water with minimal particulate.

## 2019 DIVING VACATIONS

**January 5-13 • Easter Island**

**March • Truk & Yap**

**Late May • Bonaire**

**July 6-22 • Indonesia**

The diving itself ranged from so-so to fairly good, and we had a couple of outstanding animal encounters. But I'd say my overall impression was very healthy reefs and lots of sponges (especially large barrel sponges) but not a lot of fish. Certainly not the large schools or shoals you would hope to see in places like the Maldives or Palau. And even in those places, it's not like it used to be.

This lack-of-fishiness is not specific to Roatan. Anecdotally, it's happening worldwide. There simply seems to be less fish around because either we're eating them or collecting them or killing them off with polluted waters. It's a situation that's been documented scientifically and, for those of us who have been diving certain areas time and again over the years, it's something you notice with your eyes.

Despite that, we saw some really cool stuff. Probably our favorite were the two Eagle Rays who graced us with their presence on Thursday at a spot called - no kidding - Green Outhouse. They were cruising along the wall of the drop-off and were slightly ahead of me so I thought I couldn't catch up. But they went around a corner of the reef and I saw DM John go over the top so I thought I'd also zoom over to see what was what and was quite pleased to find that they'd slowed down. I was able to not only catch up with them but to get right over the top of them (I assume this was a male/female pair) and snap off some shots, which are displayed on my SmugMug page for this trip. Either I've gotten better at not spooking them or they were very calm because I was probably only five feet or so above them (at a depth of

## UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Nov. 8	Redondo	••• Night Dive •••	<b>FREE!!!</b>
Sat.	17	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Sat.	Dec. 1	Redondo	Navigation dive (single tank)	<b>\$25</b>
Sat.	8	Catalina Express	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	<b>\$150</b>
Thu.	13	Redondo	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	<b>FREE!!!</b>
Thu.	20	- CLASS -	- FISH ID -	<b>\$25</b>

around 95 feet) and they didn't seem to mind.

On that same dive, we had a HUGE Barracuda with his mouth wide open getting cleaned, a couple of turtles, and then the Eagle Rays made a second pass through our group about five minutes later, and a large Black Grouper who "adopted" us and hung with the group for the last 10 minutes of the dive, swimming in and out of our formation as we meandered back to the boat.

We also really enjoyed the dive at Four Sponges - this was on Monday when conditions were still not great - because you drop down into an enormous field of Yellowhead Jawfish, bobbing up and down over their burrows. These guys/gals are looking to snatch a snack out of whatever floats by and may also be preening for a mate. Once they get comfortable with your presence, you can get pretty close. The Motherlode of Jawfish is finding a male who is brooding eggs in his mouth but we didn't get that lucky on this foray.

I was pleased to see a number of Nassau Groupers on various dives. Though previously plentiful in the Caribbean, it seems they went from being routinely sighted in the 80s to rarely sighted in the 2000s, so it was nice to see them on most of the dives here.

Likewise, there were juvy Princess Parrotfish in great numbers

everywhere, Stoplight Parrotfish, Redband and Bucktooth Parrotfish, and even a number of Hogfish including Spanish Hogfish, as well as a lot of Creole Wrasses.

The small-to-medium sized fish seemed to be in decent numbers so we'd see lots of Gobies, Hamlets (mainly Indigo), Sharp-Nosed Puffers, a fair number of Queen Angeles (along with a few Gray and one French), Squirrelfish, Trunkfish, juvy Filefish, and lots of Arrow Crabs, Banded Coral Shrimp, Pederson's Shrimp, and Harlequin Shrimp. (You can see all of these in the Roatan slideshow on the SmugMug page.) We saw a lot of Green Morays as well, and big ones too.

On our night dives, we found a number of Octopuses, lot of lobsters (saw them during the day too), and I even spotted a Slipper Lobster on Tuesday night.

Maybe one of the best finds for me was when DM John was able to spot a Toadfish and lure him out of his lair. In Cozumel, you'd find the Splendid Toadfish which has gorgeous colors of yellow and blue. This guy could be called the Drab Toadfish because he's basically yellowish-brown and pretty ugly (and fierce-looking to boot) and it looks like someone stepped on him and squished him. But it was a way cool find and I think we eventually saw three of them at various times in the week, including on one of

the night dives.

Probably the favorite dive for everyone was Mary's Place on Monday. This dive would normally be out of the range of the Anthony boats (it takes over an hour to get there) as it's on the south side of Roatan. But because on Mondays Anthony's schedules a special lunch of Maya Key, which they also own and which is also on the south side of Roatan, you can arrange to do Mary's.

It's basically a very large pinnacle that was split in three years ago by an earthquake. So there's a huge vertical crack that runs through it. You follow your guide in and through the crack and around and then through again. I can't tell you the exact path but there's plenty of life in the crack as well, with gorgo-

nians and sea fans abounding, as well as some feathery black coral. There are also lots of fish that hang around including a school of Jacks during our visit. Not sure if they're resident at Mary's or were just visiting.

We also got a very pleasant surprise when we cruised up into the shallows around 40 feet deep and discovered a brown Longsnout Seahorse. John said he'd never spotted this one before and I seem to recall from five years ago, that John said there really weren't many seahorses left in Roatan. It's certainly not got the reputation of Bonaire for these little guys. So this was an unexpected treasure. There's a video of this dive (and the seahorse) on our YouTube page and the link is: <https://youtu.be/Y6yx0mJNuqg>.

Y6yx0mJNuqg.

Overall, we got in 19 dives during the course of the week. Other than Mary's, I can't say there was anything spectacular in terms of the sites, but they were pleasant. Certainly, no one came up going, "THAT was a waste of time." Plan on medium-to-little stuff. Dramatic walls like you might see in Indonesia or huge schools of fish like you might find at Blue Corner in Palau are simply not what Roatan is all about.

But if you're looking for good diving, at a well-run operation, that gives you good value for the money, then Roatan and Anthony's Key Resort should certainly be on your list. We'll be going back and perhaps we'll even be able to take you along with us next time.

## PICTURE PAGE - Roatan 2018

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2018)



**The  
Toadfish**



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**Magnificent  
Eagle Rays**



**Yellowhead  
Jawfish**



**Cecilia  
& her turtle**



**Queen  
Angel**