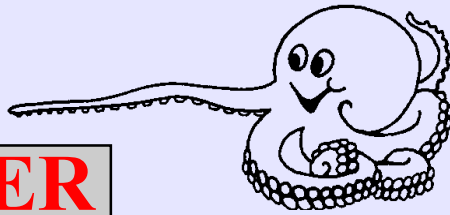


THE REEF SEEKER



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November - 2024

PALAU-BOUND

Post-script: I wrote this article on Wednesday because 7 of our 12 people were supposed to leave Thursday evening for our China Airlines flight to Palau, arriving Saturday afternoon. Note the operative word: "supposed." It seems a major typhoon was passing over Taiwan, so at 10AM Thursday morning, China Airlines canceled our LAX-Taipei flight because the actual plane that would take us there was grounded in Taipei due to the storm. Yikes!!! So most of Thursday was spent finding another way to get from here to there which isn't easy because only United and China Airlines fly from the US, and neither of them has a flight that gets there Sunday instead of Saturday. So now, at added expense I might add (and this is the value of having trip insurance which might cover these costs), we're flying into Guam on United Sunday night and will get the late night flight from Guam into Palau, arriving at 1AM and heading straight to the boat, which leaves at 6AM. I'll detail in the trip report all of the logistical gymnastics we went through to get everyone there but with that as prologue . . .

Depending on when you read this, we're in transit somewhere. We have one group on United that left on Thursday and the formerly-China Airlines group leaving later.

I prefer flying United because when I fly United I've got "status" which means I get lounge access, seat upgrades, and the like.

That wasn't the case with China Air. So I would have been just a "regular" traveler on this one with things like boarding group 42, lim-

ited overhead, and probably the guy in front of me insisting on fully reclining his seat into my lap. We shall see. (And I hope I'm exaggerating what my discomfort would have been.)

I was looking forward to the extended layovers we had in the Taipei Airport (seven hours going in, five hours coming back) as I'm told it's a very modern airport that rivals Singapore's Changi Airport, with lots of things to do, plenty of food options, and is easy to navigate. It also seems like they have some accessible pay-lounges which give you food, drinks, bathrooms, and Wi-Fi for a nominal fee. Another time perhaps.

The flip side of that will be the Palau Airport where you're warned ahead of time that they aren't any phones nor taxi stands so make sure you arrange for airport transfers ahead of time (which we've done).

On top of that, there are no flights in or out on Sundays in Palau. The flight schedules are such that for those on the earlier United flight, there will be two overnights before they board the boat. For the formerly-China Air people, we had one overnight but now will land five hours before the boat leaves Monday morning. No time for us to explore Koror which would have included a visit to the Prisoner's

Gift Shop in the Koror jail, where you generally find the best storyboards. (And how many times can you say you walked into a jail to go shopping?)

This will be our eighth trip to Palau and I'm curious to see how things have changed post-COVID. Our last trip there was in 2016 and at that time, I commented on a noticeable uptick in the volume of tourist traffic. A lot of it apparently was coming from mainland China. It was especially evident on one dive when we pulled into Ulong Channel, one of the signature dive sites, and I was able to count 50 day boats on the site, each with at least 6 divers in the water. That's 300 people on one spot!! That's nuts. (We chose an alternate site and went back after the others had left.)

But it's also indicative of what to look for anytime you go visit a foreign dive locale. As locations become more and more popular and more and more people dive them, there's bound to be a negative effect on the reefs. Palau's done a pretty good job and for good reason since tourism makes up some 85% of the annual GDP.

Palau long ago declared their reefs to be marine parks as well as shark sanctuaries. And since the end of 2017, they require all incoming visitors to sign the Palau Pledge,

which is a promise to the children of Palau that we will act in an environmentally-responsible way while we're there. Children in Palau helped draft the pledge, which reads:

Children of Palau, I take this pledge as your guest,

to preserve and protect your beautiful and unique island home.

I vow to tread lightly, act kindly, and explore mindfully.

I shall not take what is not given.

I shall not harm what does not harm me.

The only footprints I shall leave are those that will wash away.

We will be on the *Palau Aggressor II* and will get in five-and-a-half days of diving, with up to four dives each day as well as three night dives. Hopefully we'll be able to hit the well-known spots like German Channel, Ulong Channel, Sais Tunnel, and the world-famous Blue Corner (which the Aquarium of the Pacific's Tropical Reef exhibit is modeled after). I've also been told the Jellyfish Lake has been reopened so fingers crossed that we can do that as well.

The conundrum I'll face is that the boat apparently has limited-to-no internet access. I generally like to post a "Top 10 Daily Pix" on these trips but I need to have internet access to do that and I'm not sure if that will be available. I'm looking into whether I can find a way to use my phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot so we shall see. You may get some pix, but you may not. In either case, there WILL be a trip report and SmugMug slide show once the trip is completed.

So wish us luck on our adventure. We've got 12 people in the group all told and are hoping for another exciting time in Palau.



EASTER ISLAND IN MARCH

First of all, no, we're not going on Easter itself (which is April 20 next year). And we've already filled the first week so the availability is for the second week, which will be March 15-23 (travel dates). Why should we go to Easter Island? Well . . .

Who not??? It's certainly not a typical dive destination but one that had fascinated me for years because of the large carved statues there known as the moai. The original impetus for going there was the total solar eclipse of 2010 and Easter Island was right on the centerline. (As many of you know, I like to chase eclipses.) But we couldn't get any rooms at that time. But there was enough interest in going, so we decided to go a year later and in January of 2011, we arrived on Easter Island (more

correctly known as Rapa Nui).

I was personally well aware of the moai because I was familiar with the voyages to Rapa and exploratory work that had been done by Thor Hyerdahl in the 1950s. And just going there to see the moai – they're all over the island – seemed like a cool thing to do. But then we found out there was diving as well so that only increased our desire to go.

When we first went there in 2011, we hooked up with Orca Diving Center, one of only two dive shops on the island. When we were returned in 2019, there were a dozen.) Orca was run by two French brothers, Michel & Henri Garcia (both now deceased). They ran a nice operation, the dive sites were close, we'd go out in john boats for a single dive and then come back from the surface interval, and it all worked out well. We used them again when we returned in 2019 and are looking forward to diving with them again for this trip.

The diving was also very interesting. Easter Island is one of the most isolated inhabited islands on Earth and also seems to have less plankton in the water than anywhere else. That makes for a couple

2024-2025 DIVING VACATIONS

November 3-10 • Palau

March 1-9 • Easter Island #1

March 8-15 • Easter Island #2

July - Roatan??

of interesting things from a diving standpoint.

First of all, less plankton means greater visibility. In fact, viz of upwards of 200 feet is not unheard of, especially at three small rock formations just offshore, about a fifteen-minute run by boat, known as Motu Kao Kao, Mot Iti, and Moto Nui. The three of them each plunge pretty much straight down, there's no runoff if it rains, and they're far enough offshore so as not to be affected by anything shore-based either. All of that combines to give some really great viz. Plus it's interesting to look up and watch the waves/surf passing overhead.

But the other thing less plankton means is likely less fish. Normally the smaller fish are the ones who will be eating plankton. Medium fish eat the smaller ones, larger fish eat the medium ones, and really large ones eat the large ones. But with less plankton in the water, it makes it harder for those small fish to flourish and then that works its way up the food chain. So when you go to Easter Island for the diving, you don't expect to be inundated with huge schools of fish.

But there are plenty of fish to be found and, because of the remoteness, 25% of them are endemic. (This is similar to the number of endemic species in Hawaii, which is also quite isolated.) So we'll see fish like the Triangle fish, Easter Island Butterflyfish, and the Easter Island Pufferfish who is tiny and dark blue and lives in caves and lava tubes. There's also an amazingly healthy coral reef surrounding the island, consisting mainly of low-profile hard corals (again, similar to Hawaii). So while

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Wed.	Nov. 13	--- CLASS ---	--- Photo Workshop ---	35
Sat.	16	Redondo/Vets	Beach Diving	35
Wed.	20	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	180
Wed.	Dec. 4	--- CLASS ---	--- NAUI Nitrox Diver ---	95
Sat.	7	Redondo/Vets	Navigation	FREE
Thu.	12	Redondo/Vets	••• Night Dive •••	35
Wed.	18	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	180

there's a little work to do on dives to find things, as I've frequently said, diving is the world's greatest scavenger hunt and Easter Island fulfills that promise in spades.

The moai are not hard to find. There are over 1,000 of the scattered all around the island. Over the years, due to in-fighting amongst the native tribes, all of the statues were toppled. Some are still on the ground but many have been restored and sit on top of their ceremonial ahus. And since some of the statues are still buried, the restoration work continues.

So this trip is a combo of diving and land tours. We'll leave on a Saturday and arrive on Sunday early afternoon. Once we check into the hotel, we'll have time to wander around and see some the moai close to the hotel. Monday morning, we'll start diving and will eventually dive Monday-Friday. Each morning we'll do two dives and then break for lunch. On Tuesday and Thursday, we'll come back and do an afternoon dive. But on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we'll be escorted on fascinating 4-6 hour land tours by Josie Nahoe Malloy, the granddaughter of William Malloy, who took over research duties from Hyerdahl. (So we've got the right person as tour guide.)

It's a busy but great itinerary and you'll definitely see all that Easter

Island has to offer. But be aware that we are limited in how many people we can take. As I mentioned at the top, the first week is already full. The second week is filling. We're limited to seven divers (because of the size of the Orca boats) and four non-divers (because of the size of Josie's van). So if you've got a non-diving spouse or significant other who you're always leaving at home when you go on a dive trip, this is really a great opportunity to bring them along because of the uniqueness of the destination and that there's plenty of non-diving stuff to see.

Cost of this fabulous adventure for a diver is \$2,775. That covers the hotel (double-occupancy – single-supplement may be available) with breakfast daily, all the diving with tanks/weights (11 dives during the week), the land tours with Josie, airport xfers, crew/staff tips. Airfare is running around \$2,000 on LATAM and is not included in the price to Reef Seekers. The non-diver rate is \$1,945 which is the dive package minus the diving.

If you're one of those who keeps wondering what new or exotic destination you can go, Easter Island fits the bill. I guarantee you not many people have this in their dive log. So make plans to join us if you can and get ready for an incredible adventure that will produce a lifetime of memories.

AIRLINES REQUIRED TO GIVE REFUNDS

Flight cancelled or significantly delayed? In the past the response from the airlines was essentially, "Too bad." No more. Here are the details from an article that appeared on CNN:

"Airlines in the United States are now required to give passengers cash refunds if their flight is significantly delayed or canceled, even if that person does not explicitly ask for a refund.

"The Department of Transportation says the final federal rule requiring that airlines dole out refunds - not vouchers - went into effect Monday. The major change is being implemented only a month before the start of what is likely to

be a huge holiday travel season.

"Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg made the announcement on X after he first presented the proposed rule back in April.

"The new rule mandates that refunds are automatically processed by an airline if a passenger's flight is "canceled or significantly changed, and they do not accept the significantly changed flight, rebooking on an alternative flight, or alternative compensation."

"The Department of Transportation says airlines must then refund a passenger within seven business days if they bought a ticket on a credit card and within 20 calendar days if they used another form of payment.

"The move has faced pushback

from the airline industry. In July, Buttigieg told airlines that they must make clear to passengers when they are entitled to a refund. "In a statement, industry lobby Airlines for America said, "we support the automatic refund rule and are happy to accommodate customers with a refund when they choose not to be rebooked."

TURN THE CLOCKS BACK

Just a reminder that at 2AM this coming Sunday, we revert to Standard Time, so remember to turn your clocks back one hour before you go to sleep Saturday night.

And on Tuesday, make sure you go and vote if you haven't done so already.

PICTURE PAGE - Easter Island fish

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2024)

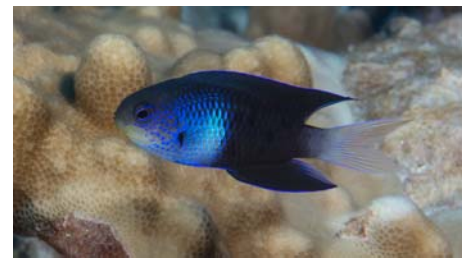


Feminine Wrasse
(these are all females)



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Easter Island Damselfish



Trianglefish
(Plessis' Morwong)



Orangehead Pygmy Angelfish



Lots of lobsters
(no, you can't take them)