

THE REEF SEEKER



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December - 2016

SCUBA CUBA, OR MAYBE NOT

Over the last year or so I've been asked a lot about running a trip to Cuba. In years past, you could surreptitiously make a land trip happen by going through Toronto or Cancun (and asking them not to stamp your passport so you could get back into the US). As relations with Cuba improved, a few years ago you could then make "educational" trips. And with Obama's semi-normalizing of relations with Cuba and the addition of direct flights from L.A. and the like, it seems like Cuba had opportunity to become the next must-go place as reports of diving the Gardens of the Queen area are very positive. It's even the Fall 2016 cover story in "Alert Diver."

But the results of November 8 may have changed all of that.

From an tour operator standpoint, the last thing you want is hassle. My position on Cuba has always been practical, not political. I have assumed even with Obama opening things up, that there would be glitches in the overall process and I was in no rush to be among the first to go down there because I simply didn't want to have to deal with the glitches nor have you suffer them either. And while the addition of two Aggressor boats -

Jardines Aggressor I & II - makes it tempting, I was still in no rush.

But over the weekend, two things happened that give me pause as a tour organizer/operator. The first was the death of Fidel Castro. On the one hand, you might think that the passing of Castro - even though it's his brother running the country now - might help speed up even further the normalization and thawing of relations and that's got to be good for business.

But then on Monday, President-elect Donald Trump indicated that he might reverse course and threatened Monday to "terminate" the Obama administration's efforts to normalize US-Cuba relations. "If Cuba is unwilling to make a better deal for the Cuban people, the Cuban/American people and the U.S. as a whole, I will terminate the deal," Trump tweeted.

That gives someone like me great pause. The last thing I would want to do (or need), is to plan a trip, collect deposits from you, send money to whomever for said trip, and then find out pre-trip that the embargo has been re-instated and the trip has been cancelled. How do I get the money back? What do I do if I can't get the money back? How do I refund you?

These are the kinds of things we always try to take into account when planning any trip but spe-

cifically a Cuba trip, and specifically because some of you have asked me when we might do a trip there, much as I'd love to go, I'm now leery about scheduling a visit until we see which way things will shake out overall. I had considered possibly making Cuba a 2017 destination but now think it's best for me to wait until at least 2018.

Of course, this wouldn't prevent you from planning a Cuba trip on your own during 2017. I would simply urge you to do so with your eyes wide open. Anytime we're planning these trips and then traveling, we keep an eye on any developing political situations. Going to the Red Sea last year (from Egypt) and then the Maldives just last month (having to go through Turkey) are two good examples. From a trip leader standpoint, you try to find out as much as possible, mitigate problems ahead of time, and be aware the entire time you're there.

But it just seems to me the potential for problems in Cuba with an incoming administration that seems willing to shake things up, it just pushes it beyond the comfort zone for me and Reef Seekers. And since people have asked about this trip, I wanted to let you know where we stood.



GIVE THE GIFT OF YAP FOR CHRISTMAS

How about putting a Manta under the Christmas tree this year? If you're wondering what to get the diver on your list (or yourself) give some thought to giving the Gift of Yap and join us for one of our two "Immerse Yourself in Yap" trips in 2017.

These will be slightly different than previous trips we've done to Yap in that they're going to be 10 days long instead of 7, and with the extra time, we're able to also include a nitrox class (if needed), photo workshop, a Manta ID course (PADI-sanctioned), an island tour to get a feel for the history of Yap and the role it played in World War 2, as well as all of the other "regular" things we do on our trips to Yap.

In case you didn't know it, Yap is home to some of the most reliable manta ray sightings in the world as they glide into the Stammtisch cleaning station for grooming and sometimes even for displays of mating and courtship behavior. On top of that, we'll be able to observe sharks up close and in the wild, watch tiny Mandarinfish go through their nightly trysts, explore pristine reefs, and even do a few exploratory dives.

We will do all of us this using the fabulous Manta Ray Bay as home base and diving with the Manta Man himself, Bill Acker. The resort itself is drop-dead gorgeous and wonderful, we'll get breakfast included each day on the sailing vessel *Mnuw*, we'll introduce you to the lunchtime delicacies of Ganir, you'll be able to adjourn to

the Nautical Bar in the Crow's Nest each night to make up new lies about your diving prowess, and you'll have one heck of a good time. Yap is truly one of our favorite places to go, Manta Ray Bay is our hands-down favorite dive resort, and it's always a good time when Bill and Ken Kurtis start swapping tales.

We're running this as two trips. The first using LAX as start/end point - this can be done from other cities as well) is July 7-19 and the second is July 21-August 2. Cost is the same for both: \$2,995/person. If there's a non-diver who might want to come with you, we can set up a non-diver rate as well. (There's some good snorkeling to be had, even at the cleaning station.)

Each week is limited to 12 divers so don't get left out as we're able half-full now for each. If this IS something you'd like to give as a present, I'm including our flyer as page 3 of this newsletter &/or we can doll up a Reef Seekers gift certificate for you. We can even print it on some really nice paper for you.

This is going to be loads of fun and I hope you'll be able to join us.

MALDIVES TRIP REPORT & PIX

We had a great time going back to the Maldives (first time since 2002). The diving was fabulous and we got to see some old friends again. Go to www.reefseekers.com to get the links. You can see a few of the pix at the bottom of page 4.

One of the highlights and unique dives was a dusk dive we did at Shark Circus. There were dozens and dozens and 8-10 foot long Nurse Sharks who were on the move, brushing by us, checking out the edges of our lights, and just generally meandering all over the reef, and usually at a fairly high speed. They were eventually joined by a number of large stingrays and groups of Bluefin & Giant Trevallies in their quest for a snack and those guys can REALLY move and turn on a dime. So by the end of the dive an hour later, it had really become a feeding frenzy that was simply amazing to watch. And wait until you hear about the school of Silversides that engulfed us at the end of the dive . . .

If you haven't read the trip report yet, take some time to do so and enjoy the trip with us vicariously.

2017 DIVING VACATIONS

March 18-25 • Bonaire

June 10-17 • Isla Mujeres

July 7-19 • Yap Immersion #1

July 21 - Aug 2 • Yap #2



JOIN REEF SEEKERS DIVE CO.
& MANTA RAY BAY
AND IMMERSE YOURSELF IN YAP
NEXT YEAR (2017)

Special 13-day trip (10 days in Yap) includes:

- Ocean View double-occupancy room
 - Breakfast daily
 - Up to 24 dives total
- Manta cleaning station dives
- Manta ID class (sanctioned by PADI)
 - Manta ID project
 - Mandarinfish dive
 - Shark feed
 - Photo workshop
- Full-day island tour
 - Reef dives
 - Wall dives
 - Macro dives
- Nitrox (training for those not certified)
 - Kayak the mangroves
 - Visit a Stone Money bank
- Village tour showing native life in Yap
 - Departure day late checkout
 - Airport transfers in Yap
 - Dive & hotel staff tips

Two trip dates to choose from:
July 7-19 or July 21-August 2, 2017

\$2,995/diver - limited to 12 divers max/trip

CALL 310/652-4990 TO SECURE YOUR SPOT

Reef Seekers
DIVE COMPANY
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA

**Manta Ray Bay
RESORT
& Yap Divers**
mantaray.com

DECEMBER NIGHT DIVE

Let's give this one more shot in 2016: Reef Seekers will again sponsor one of our fabulous FREE night dives on Wednesday, December 14, at Vets Park. Check out TWARS as we get closer but the general plan will be to meet in the parking lot at 6PM (if you can get there that early) so we're in the water by 7PM and not make it too late an evening. Since sundown even now is before 5PM, lack-of-darkness won't be an issue.

As always this will be a 1-tank dive and part of the goal will be to go down into Redondo Canyon and search for any squid eggs or mating squid. Although the squid runs are hard to predict with any

accuracy (a few years ago we had a massive one in August), the "season" is generally considered to be December through March. And there have been some squid boats parked off of Vets in the last week or so as well as off of Catalina so we may have a shot. But with or without squid, night dives at Vets are always interesting and lately we've been seeing thousands of Target Shrimp. Hopefully we'll also get some octopi, scorpionfish, pipefish, cusk eels, and more.

If you're interested in joining us for this, make sure you sign up either through e-mail or with a phone call to 310/652-4990. Generally, we'll make a weather call that afternoon no later than 2PM. Fingers crossed conditions will be good and that you can join us.

BLACK SEA SHIPWRECKS

The sea holds many secrets but gives some of them up. And the secret fate of 40 ships, some 1,000 years old, was recently disgorged by the Black Sea. Because they're half a mile deep, the cold water and lack of oxygen (which means wood-eating creatures can't survive down there), the wrecks are astonishingly well-preserved.

The wrecks are located off of the coasts of Bulgaria and are being hailed as one of archeology's - and certainly ocean archeology - greatest finds. If you'd like to learn more about this, just go out and Google "Black Sea Shipwrecks" and you should get a number of links. Pretty amazing.

PICTURE PAGE - Maldives 2016

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2016)



Big puffer



P.O. Box 634
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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



Huge school of Glass Snappers



Pair of Pixy Hawkfish



Milestone dives for Tamar, Henry, & Laurie



Pucker-up Parrotfish