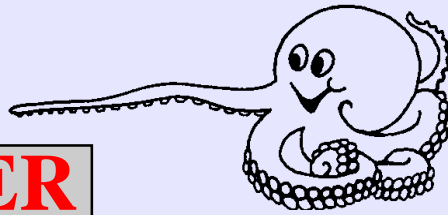


THE REEF SEEKER



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July - 2007



GREETINGS FROM OVERSEAS

I'm writing this newsletter this month while sitting at the Manta Ray Bay Hotel in Yap, one of the four states of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). And much as I have enjoyed the diving (more on that momentarily), I continue to marvel at how much scuba diving enriches our lives. Not because of the dives we do and the experiences we have underwater, but because of the people and cultures of the world our sport exposes us to.

Just in the past 24 hours, I've had lunch with Mormon missionaries, had drinks with some Peace Corps volunteers, talked with the guy who's the head of the FSM Olympic Committee (and who thinks they may actually have a shot at a medal in weightlifting at the 2008 Olympics), and discussed diving

Scapa Flow with some divers from Scotland.

Your certification card not only allows you explore a world hidden to many others, but it also gives you impetus to seek out new destinations and new peoples all over the world and in doing so, you will find that you become a more interesting and more well-rounded person due to the experiences you will have and the cultures into which you will be immersed (no pun intended).

What other sport can give you all of that . . . in addition to the amazing adventure of being one with the fish?

THE SCUBA SHOW

If you didn't make it to the recent Scuba Show in Long Beach, you missed one of the best-attended and most diverse shows in recent memory. About 11,000 of your fellow divers attended and there were booths from many of the major manufacturers, some dive shops, and plenty of travel destinations.

There were also plenty of seminars to go to where you could learn about digital photography, videography, how to buy dive gear, where to go beach diving, and plenty more. We were also pleased

to see that, for the second year in a row, our "Why Divers Die" seminar that we do in conjunction with the LA County Coroner and the Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber was one of the best-attended of the seminars.

One of the great things about this sport is the willingness of divers to share ideas with each other and the enthusiasm that divers have for the sport. That was present in abundance at Long Beach.



CHANGES IN THE BOAT SCHEDULE

We've made some minor changes in the boat schedule, dropping a couple of trips. What we've essentially done is gone to an every-other-week schedule. Especially when you add in our foreign trips, we may have simply spread ourselves a little too thin and gone for too ambitious a local schedule. It really only involves a few trips (the first would have been July 15) but we think it'll allow us to better serve your diving needs without overtaxing our staff. If you have any questions, please let us know.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

July 5	Fish I.D.	Aug. 2	Fish I.D.
11	Night Diving	8	Night Diving
12	Photo Workshop	11	Beach Diving/Navig.
14	Beach Diving/Navig.	18	CPR/Oxygen/1st Aid
14	CPR/Oxygen/1st Aid	30	Sea Signs
19	Tables & Computers	Sept. 6	Fish I.D.
26	PADI Digital Diver	9	Beach Diving/Navig.

PALAU/YAP MINI-REPORT

I've just enjoyed my final lunch at Ganir in Yap and now have time to reflect on the past two weeks. I'd have to say that, overall, this has been one of our best Palau/Yap trips ever.

It certainly didn't start off that way. As many of you know, Continental delayed our flight out of LA by 10 hours, which caused us to miss the flight to Guam (and on to Palau) and then the next day cancelled our flight to Guam as well, which meant that the best we could hope for was ending up in Palau on Monday evening.

And even that wasn't looking too promising (the Sunday flight was overbooked) until I was able to e-mail Larry Kellner, CEO of Continental, and asked him to intervene, which he did. They made room for us on the non-stop to Guam and got us down to Palau Monday night. We still missed a day of diving, but at least we didn't miss two days.

The folks on the *Palau Aggressor II* were terrific. Captain Mike Farmer offered five dives each day to help us make up for the lost day of diving and we had some spectacular dives. We had one dive at Blue Corner that was just magical, with sharks and schooling barra-

cuda and curious Napoleon Wrasses and a gazillion fish all around. Peleliu Express certainly lived up to its name as it whipped us across Peleliu Corner at break-neck speed. Saies Tunnel was once again a lovely dive and the walls of Palau (Big Drop, Matt's Fern's) are simply top-of-the-heap.

We also had a great week in Yap. We started with a very productive macro dive late in the afternoon following our early morning (2:30AM) arrival. And we followed that up with the Mandarinfish Dive that was simply amazing with dozens of the little guys and gals on each coral head and with a whole lot of mating going on.

But the big claim to fame for Yap are the mantas and we had the best and most productive manta activity I've ever had here. We not only didn't get skunked once but we

usually had multiple mantas and frequently had them hanging around for as long as an hour, swooping in to take a peek at us, and holding their position over the cleaning stations while the cleaner fish detailed them. At one point, I even had one drift over the top of me, literally about two inches from my nose the entire time. Gives you a very different perspective on things when you watch this enormous white 12-foot underside go over you from its mouth to its tail from that distance. Remember that opening scene in the original *Star Wars*? It's a little like seeing that battle cruiser pass overhead.

On top of all of that, we did some reef dives (the southern Yap reefs rival those of Palau) and we ended up with a shark feed that was very high-voltage entertainment and which included Blacktips, Grey Reef, Silkies, a Silvertip, and even a Hammerhead (which only a couple of people saw).

All in all, a really great trip, despite the rocky start. The full trip report and dozens of pictures will be available on our website (www.reefseekers.com) by the end of the week. There are also a few pictures on the bottom of the page 4 of this newsletter.

DIVING VACATIONS

August 11-18 • Bonaire

**October 7-15 • Sea of Cortez
(20th Anniversary trip)**

WHERE TO IN 2008???

CORAL DECLARED ENDANGERED

We told you previously about a significant coral bleaching that was going on in the Caribbean. This can happen for a number of reasons, but usually occurs when waters temps warm up too much and the coral turns white. (The warmer waters, especially in the Caribbean, also help generate stronger and more frequent hurricanes, but that's a different article.)

Due to the bleaching that's been going on recently, both Elkhorn and Staghorn Coral have been put on the Endangered Species List, offering them federal protection. It's unknown what impact this may have on diving but it poses an interesting dilemma since usually, you're prohibited from approaching creatures protected under the Endangered Species Act unless the approach you, and how could you ever make that work for coral, short of banning divers from being anywhere near coral, which would mean you couldn't dive an effected reef. Now, we're not saying that this will happen but it does present itself as an interesting question.

The hope is that the coral will recover quickly. Many times it does but sometimes the bleaching has a devastating effect on not only the coral, but also on the fish species that depend on the coral for habitat and protection. It's certainly too early to tell what the outcome will be but it's certainly something we'll keep our eye on.

STATE OF THE STORE

The question I'm asked most frequently since January is: When are

UPCOMING BOAT DIVES

July 7	<i>Magician</i>	••• Oil Rigs (limited load) •••	\$130/140
21	<i>Great Escape</i>	San Clemente (backside)	145/155
Aug. 5	<i>Great Escape</i>	Farnsworth/Catalina backside	130/140
12	<i>Magician</i>	••• Oil Rigs (limited load) •••	130/140
25	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	145/155
Sept. 2	<i>Magician</i>	Catalina (West End)	120/130
8	<i>Magician</i>	••• Oil Rigs (limited load) •••	130/140
16	<i>Cee Ray</i>	Farnsworth/Catalina backside	130/140
22	<i>Magician</i>	<i>Olympic</i> wreck/Catalina front	120/130
Oct. 6	<i>Cee Ray</i>	Catalina (Italian Gardens)	120/130

Prices are listed as 14-day advanced purchase/regular. Food/air included all trips. All diving to be done on compressed air only - no nitrox. Fuel surcharge may apply.

you going to reopen? The honest answer is: I'm not sure. And let me reassure you that we not going away. We just may be structured a little differently. (But then again, uniqueness has always been one of the keys to our success.) Let me give you some of the thinking process.

Obviously, one of the biggest problems was losing our lease in Beverly Hills. (Ironically, while I've been in Micronesia, the Beverly Hills City Council was supposed to do a final up-or-down vote on the project and I don't right now know what the outcome was.) We loved the location we had, really liked our building, and we had a fairly good deal.

Unfortunately, lease rates have skyrocketed in the five years since we made our deal. To get a similar space now (and we're not married to the idea of staying in Beverly Hills, but would want to stay Westside-ish) would cost us double to quadruple what we were paying. That means we'd be adding anywhere from \$60,000 to \$180,000 in overhead and it simply doesn't make economic sense to add that kind of a financial burden if you're going to do the same thing you were doing in the same

way you were doing it.

However . . . that doesn't mean we can't do things differently and make it all work.

To do it again means, to me, to do it "right." And when you're talking about a dive shop, that means these magic words: Pool On Site. And not just some glorified Jacuzzi with a deep end. I'd want to have a good-sized pool (at least the size of the Salesian Boys & Girls Club that we've been using) and one specifically designed for scuba training with a specialized deep end, boat-style ladders for exiting, and I even have a design for a practice dive boat at the end of the deep end so you could do boat exits and giant stride entries just like off a real dive boat.

In addition, we'd want this thing set up so that we could offer swimming, aqua aerobics, aqua therapy, maybe kids birthday pool scuba parties, and stuff like that. In other words, it's got to be a full-service pool, not just a scuba pool.

The retail side of it would need to offer gear, a photo area, travel, classrooms, meeting rooms, maybe some sort of a small cafe, perhaps a photo art gallery, good book collection, and stuff like that. In short,

it would hopefully be your “ideal” dive shop.

Needless to say, all of this won't fit into 2500 square feet (which is what we had before). So we've really got to do some looking for available space/land. And then there's the matter of financing it all. But it's doable. I've already got my eye on two places, both vacant right now, that would be suitable. But none of this will happen tomorrow.

Ironically, it's only now (July 1) that I'm getting some time to really look into all of this stuff. Since we lost the lease at the close of the day December 31, it's not like I sat around popping Bon-Bons all day. Chamber Day immediately gobbled up time, as did the me-

chanics of closing out the books on the “old” Reef Seekers. And then I had a trip to Cocos in April, Chamber Day in May, the Scuba Show in June and the Palau/Yap trip at the end of June. So July 2 is really the first workday I won't have all of these other things hanging over me and can actually devote time to seeing how/if this can all work out.

In the meantime, we continue to be a let's-go-diving type of operation. We will continue to do our local trips, we will continue to do our foreign trips (we've got Bonaire in August and Baja in October) and we'll continue to offer non-basic classes like Fish ID (this Thursday), Beach Diving & Navigation, Sea Signs, Advanced, Rescue, etc., etc. We will continue

to service your gear through Robert Stark, our longtime repair guy. And the reality is that all of that keeps us pretty busy and has worked out well so far. And there's no saying that perhaps that's what Reef Seekers Version II will end up being. We're sort of a work-in-progress to some degree.

So that's what's going on. Hard to believe it's been 6 months since we last closed the doors at 8612 Wilshire. But these last 180 days have been pretty good to us and we appreciate the continued support you show us as well as the “We didn't-realize-how-much-we-missed-you” phone calls and e-mails. So bear with us because we think no matter what direction we take, it'll be a great ride that you'll want to share with us.

PICTURE PAGE - PALAU & YAP 2007

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2007)



***Whitetip at Blue Corner
in Palau***



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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



***Mass of jellies
at Jellyfish Lake (Palau)***



***Nothing like starting your
morning with a Manta (Yap)***



***Mating Mandarinfish
(Yap)***



***Shark takes the bait
(Yap)***