

THE REEF SEEKER



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WHAT A YEAR IT'S BEEN

First of all, thanks for a great (and interesting) 2007.

It was exactly one year ago that things changed significantly for Reef Seekers and for me (Ken Kurtis) personally. We'd lost our lease, Billy Wright and I amicably ended our 18-year business partnership, and I embarked as the sole owner of Reef Seekers which was - at least temporarily - going to be a retail-less travel-oriented operation. (I mean we all got into this sport to GO diving, right???)

In short, 2007 ended up being a very successful year.

First of all, you should know that there are close to 2000 of you who get the newsletter &/or the weekly "This Week at Reef Seekers" (TWARS) e-mail. It seems like I've heard from each and every one of you at some point during the year either asking how I was doing, asking how the hunt for a new store was coming, how Reef Seekers was doing overall, how Billy was doing, and stuff like that.

This kind of personal support underscores one of the goals Billy and I (and Maurice Douek at the time as our third partner) set out for Reef Seekers. We didn't just want to be another dive shop. We

wanted to be "your" dive shop. We wanted to form a personal connection with our customers that goes far beyond what you've bought, what we've sold you, where we've taken you, or where you'd like to go next.

And this past year has had an unexpected dividend. (I guess this would all fall under the category of "unexpected consequences.")

Although I felt I knew many of you pretty well, I think that's gotten even better this year. That's because our office staff has become basically... me (with Robert Stark doing repairs and Eleanor Vallee still doing our in-house books.) But basically, when you call Reef Seekers, you're going to get me. That means that I've got direct contact with each and every one of you going on every one of our trips (even if sometimes it's only e-mail). It's also easier to solve any problems that might arise since you're dealing directly with the problem-solver (and in some cases, the problem-maker).

The other nice thing is that when I'm in the office (which is generally most of the day), I've got the e-mail open all the time. And when I hear a "click" that indicates there's an incoming e-mail, I generally try to look at it and respond fairly quickly. I've had many near-real-time discussions with lots of

you via e-mail. This means you get better lines of communication with Reef Seekers as well as faster answers to your questions and solutions to your problems. So it seems like it's win-win all the way around.

We still believe that diving is simply one of the most amazing things you can do as it exposes us to a world that relatively few people get to see, it allows to travel to places on the globe that many people have never heard of, and we form these really wonderful, oftentimes lifelong personal bonds with the people we dive with. What more could one possibly ask for out of a recreational sport?

So thanks for a great 2007. We're going to keep forging ahead in 2008 along the same lines. We've got a great list of local trips, diving each other week, as well as a wonderful selection of foreign travel for you to choose from. And we're working on a "new" concept for what a retail dive shop should be. It's going to take a while to develop and build but will definitely be worth the wait and will (hopefully) have you going, "What a brilliant idea."

So here's looking ahead to a fantastic 2008. Thanks for sharing the journey with us and we hope you're as excited about what lies ahead as we are.

THE TSA WANTS YOUR BATTERIES????

Yes and no.

I was forwarded a proposed regulation from the TSA that dealt with rechargeable lithium-ion batteries. (It's even on their website.) In short, the proposal said that the TSA was going to limit these types of batteries (which are used for laptops, cell phones, digital, cameras, and other electronics) on flights, restricting them from checked baggage, requiring them to be in your carryon, but suggesting limitations (seemingly rather strict) on how many spare/extra batteries a passenger could bring in addition to the battery in the device. These regulations (which are actually at the behest of the DOT) are supposed to take effect January 1.

One of the most confusing aspects off all of this is that the proposals are written referring not to the size of the batteries but to the amount of lithium (in grams) actually contained in the battery. Of course, this is information that we, the consumers, don't have. So who knows what battery is good and what isn't? And what will your choices be when some TSA guy decides that your \$200 back-up laptop battery doesn't qualify and your choices are to not get on the flight or throw it away? Not a pleasant thought.

On December 29, I talked with a TSA supervisor in Philadelphia about this and was assured that these regulations will NOT be put into play at the first of the year. However, they are looking at the situation and trying to figure out

what to do.

It seems, from reading the information on the website, that the main concern is that these types of batteries could spark and start a fire, let alone perhaps be used for some sort of explosive device. There is lots of talk on the website about proper storage and transport of these batteries, and making sure the contacts can't short out, and stuff like that. To my knowledge, there's never been a problem that they're reacting to. It may just be another one of those things where someone said "Yes, that could happen" and someone else said "Well, then we need to regulate it." It's not necessarily based on any real-life situation (such as the infamous Richard Reid attempted shoe bombing that forces us all -still - to remove shoes at the airport).

I checked the TSA website again on December 31 and saw that they updated the battery info but it now links to a non-TSA site and once again says the regs go into effect January 1. It also talks about this being a hazmat/fire issue rather than a security concern. Regardless of when/if this will take effect, the whole situation points out a problem we divers frequently run into given the amount of

electronics we tend to carry.

For instance, I still shoot with Nikon SB-105s which use AA batteries. This means that I frequently am carrying two Costco 48-packs with me (24 sets of 4-AA batteries). Over the past few years I've been told (1) Carry them in carry-on, (2) They're prohibited in my carry-on and need to be in one checked bag, (3) They can't all be in one checked bag and must be spread around, (4) They can be in my carry-on if there aren't too many, (5) They can all be in my carry-on but should all be grouped together.

The point is that, especially with batteries, it's a volatile and ever-changing regulatory field. Although the current blip doesn't appear aimed at AA batteries (rechargeable or not), it also appears that there are regulatory concerns but no one's sure how to address them.

So it appears to be a developing situation and we'll do our best to keep you posted. Your best bet is probably to track what's going on (hopefully) through the TSA's website at www.tsa.gov. Look on the ride side for the box marked "In the News."

2008 DIVING VACATIONS

February 10-16 - Florida

April 6-15 - Socorro

May or June - Yap

CALLING ALL MANATEE LOVERS

We're going to Florida next month February 10-16 to dive with the Manatees and explore the springs and caverns of central Florida. Cost of the trip (without airfare - many people are using miles) will be around \$1400 (we're still working on final pricing). That includes all diving, tanks/weights, boats (when needed), a shared vehicle, hotels, some breakfasts, entry fees and tips, and airport transfers.

Given that we're leaving in a month, I need to firm up those who are going and get payments from you. Give me a call at 310/652-4990 or e-mail me at kenkurtis@aol.com . It's going to be a relatively small group, a great trip (somewhat of an adventure, actually), and a good time will be had by all. I hope you can join us.

MANTAS & HAMMER-HEADS, ANYONE??

We're sort of in a similar situation (but with a bit more lead time) with our trip to Socorro and the Revillagigedo Islands April 6-15. This is a great place to interact with some of the friendliest (and biggest) Manta Rays in the world, along with Hammerheads, dolphins, and other pelagics through in for good measure. We'll be doing this journey on the Nautilus Explorer and will end up with 6 days of diving. Cost of the trip will be around \$3795 and that covers airfare from L.A., diving, meals on board, tanks/weights, crew tip, and airport transfers. We've only got 12 spots reserved on the boat and would love to have you join us. It's going to be loads of fun.

2008 UPCOMING BOAT DIVES

Sat	Jan. 12	<i>Great Escape</i>	Farnsworth/Cat. backside	\$140/150
Sun	27	<i>Great Escape</i>	San Clemente (frontside)	150/160
Sat	Feb. 9	<i>Sea Bass</i>	••• Oil Rigs (limited load)	135/145
Sat	23	<i>Cat.Express</i>	Avalon U/W Cleanup	110
Sun	Mar. 9	<i>Magician</i>	Catalina (Frontside)	130/140
Sat	22	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	150/160
Sun	Apr. 6	<i>Great escape</i>	San Clemente (NW)	150/160
Sat	19	<i>Sea Bass</i>	Palawan/Avalon/Domin.	130/140

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.

2, 3, OR 4 TO A STATEROOM

The last couple of trips we've had people ask us if we can have more than 2 people in a reserved Great Escape stateroom and the answer is: Yes. If you're willing to share, we're happy to pack you in. The specific situation dealt with two couples who each wanted staterooms but we only had one left. But they were willing to share so it worked out fine.

And let's be very clear: Our normal policy is 2 people to stateroom. So don't worry that if you reserve a stateroom, we're going to stick more people in with you. We'll only go over two people at the specific request of the people who originally reserved the stateroom.

Each stateroom has two double beds, an upper and a lower. (The lower in #4 - under the stairs - might be a little tight for two people.) If there are only 2 people in a stateroom, each person can have a bunk or the two people can share a double.

Once you go to 3 or 4 people, you HAVE to put two people in the double(s). As long as everyone's

OK with that arrangement, we're fine with it too. It doesn't increase the number of people we'll put on a trip, simply the number of people to whom we can give a stateroom (which will actually decrease the number of people in regular bunks). You get a little more room, a little more privacy, and you don't have to worry about getting down to the boat early enough to get the bunk you want.

Staterooms can be pre-reserved with us, still at \$10/diver. When you make your reservation, just ask if any staterooms are still available. And even if they're not, we can still put you on the boat and wait-list you for a stateroom should one open up.

You can also request a specific stateroom, if it's available. The way we designate them, #1-3 are on the port side of the boat and #4-6 are on the starboard side. #1 is directly across from the stairs, #2 is the middle, #3 is the rear, #4 is under the stairs, #5 is the middle, and #6 is the rear. There will also be a sign on your stateroom with the names of both (or all) the people assigned to that stateroom.

So that's the stateroom story with Reef Seekers. If you have questions, please let us know.



JEAN WRIGHT HAS DIED

It's with great sadness that we tell you that Jean Wright, Billy's mom, died December 9 after a long (19-year) battle with cancer. Jean was a fighter and had gone through a number of remissions but eventually time and the disease took their toll.

Because of the Christmas and New Year's holidays which made it impossible for many of Jean's east coast relatives to come for a service, the memorial has been delayed and is scheduled to take place on Saturday, January 19, at St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church, 3646 Coldwater Canyon Ave. (just south of Ventura Blvd.) in Studio City. The services will begin at 4PM with a catered reception to follow. The food will be provided by Barone's Restaurant, one of Jean's favorites, and the selections will include hot fudge sundaes (catered by Coldstone) which were not only Jean's favorite, but also one of her last requests.

Jean touched a lot of people during the years she and her late husband Bill ran Sunland Sports Lodge and then custom-making wetsuits out of their home under the Sundance name. The services are open to all and we certainly hope that many of you will be able to attend to remember Jean and celebrate her life. If you have any questions, you can contact Billy directly at 818/429-2312 or at wrightdiver@roadrunner.com .

PICTURE PAGE - Rose Parade, 1/1/08

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2008)



***Here comes
the circus to town***



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WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM



***Floral
dolphin***



***We LOVED the
Treasures of Egypt float***



***And we LOVED
the Mardi Gras float***



***Divers populate the
City of Long Beach float***