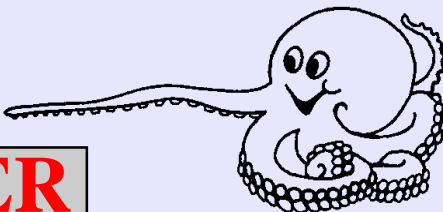


# THE REEF SEEKER



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August - 2008



## YAP 2008 TRIP REPORT

There's no question I love diving. There's no question I happy to wax poetic about it. And there's no question that that's what I'm about to do as we've just returned from a magical week exploring the underwater sights offered up by the island of Yap. We had some dives that can best be described as incredible and unique. I am by no means a religious person but I am now convinced that if there is a heaven, it's not up above us in the clouds but lies 37 feet below the waters of Goofnuw Channel in the guise of a Manta cleaning station. More on that a bit later.

We stayed, as usual, at Manta Ray Bay Resort (MRB). Once again, I'll tell you that it is hands-down the nicest dive resort you'll ever stay in. The physical place is simply, IMHO, magnificent. The rooms are gorgeous and well-appointed, the grounds immaculate, the dive center well laid-out with great camera stations, ample gear storage, and the most beautiful

rinse tanks (tile-lined AND lighted) that you'll ever see.

One of the joys of going to Yap and specifically to Manta Ray Bay is the attitude of the entire staff. The Yapese people in general are a very friendly and accommodating people and the whole island has a very unpretentious feel to it. The staff at MRB takes that even a step further and will do whatever they can to accommodate your needs. And they'll do it with a smile.

This was my fifth trip to Yap. One of the problems Yap has (and I've been guilty of this too) is that it's perceived as a place where you only spend a few days on your way to or from some other place where you'll spend a full week. So a lot of people tack on a stay in Yap to a full week in either Palau or Truk. And while I won't go so far as to say "That's a mistake" (you've only got so many vacation days), I will say that you can easily short-change yourself by not staying a full week in Yap.

In the course of our week, we chose to "only" do four Manta dives because there are other great things to see too. We were able to spend time on the southern reefs (Lionfish Wall, Gilman Wall, and Magic Kingdom are outstanding), we explored the macro sites (Slow & Easy, and then Easy & Slow when we did it backwards - we didn't get

to Macro or 1 to 2), we watched the dusk mating rituals of the Mandarinfish, we explored other outer reefs, and we had a shark feed that was out of this world.

I think some of the most spectacular reefs are in the southern area. We started at Yap Caverns, which is a series of swim-throughs and an easy place to start. You finish that dive and make a choice of turning left and visiting Lionfish Wall or turning right and visiting Gillman Wall. These two are both spectacular dives.

I also happen to really like the macro dive sites. They remind me very much of the muck dives that you would find in places like the Lembeh Straits in Indonesia (where Reef Seekers will be at the end of August). There's no telling what you're going to find. At Slow & Easy, there's a resident Mantis Shrimp who will perch at the top of his hole to see who's diving. We can also find Lionfish here too, as well as a profusion of Shrimp Gobies and (blind) Bulldozer Shrimp. Plus you're likely to run into all kinds of Damselfish hiding in the branching corals, nudibranchs of every color and hue, and there's even a spot at the end of the dive that houses 10,000 (or so it seems) Cardinalfish of various species, all hovering just above the coral ready to duck in to safety if a threat

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

Aug. 7	Fish I.D.	Sept.11	Photo Workshop
9	Beach Diving/Nav	13	Beach Diving/Nav
13	Night Diving	18	Rescue
16	CPR/Oxygen/1st Aid	25	NAUI Advanced
30	Practical Navigation	Oct. 2	Fish I.D.
Sept. 4	Fish ID	8	Night Diving
10	Night Diving	11	Beach Diving/Nav

should appear. In fact, it was fascinating to watch a couple of wrasses work the edge of the school until they were able to successfully strike and grab a snack.

The Mandarinfish dive would also qualify as a muck dive. It takes place at Rainbow Reef, a 10-minute run away. This is a dusk dive as the fish are active from shortly before sundown until shortly after. Everyone parks themselves on a coral head and starts looking for Mandarinfish. If you're lucky, you'll see a male and female pair up and rise off of the reef to mingle sperm and eggs that will then drift off to start life.

But there's no question that when you think of Yap, you probably think of Manta Rays. The rays are there all year round spending half the year in M'il Channel and half the year in Goofnuw Channel, which was where we found them.

This was our most amazing Manta dive, from my dive log: "Didn't expect much from this dive either. I stationed myself to the side and in front of the cleaning station. Current had picked up and the vis had dropped noticeably. I was afraid this was going to be a waste of time. That's when the first Manta came in. Very nice. I glided around to the back and John motioned me to a great spot right under the Manta's tail and almost on top of

the station. This gave me a great view . . . When the second one came in to join the first. And then a third one (our female from the first dive) not only came in to join the party, but did so by swimming almost eye level with me and directly over my head. Remember the opening of Stars Wars??? Well, she was the Imperial Battlecruiser passing over me. Kept going and going and going. Nice. Then a fourth Manta slid into the mix. And if that weren't good enough, a FIFTH one dropped in as well. At one point we had all five of them lined up over the (now crowded) top of the cleaning station. To say this was a magical dive would be an understatement and we were all fascinated watching the five of them glide in and out, work around each other, and get the job done. I am by no means a religious person but I am now convinced that if there is a heaven, it's not up above

us in the clouds but lies 37 feet below the waters of Goofnuw Channel in the guise of a Manta cleaning station."

I think the best part of this was when there were already two mantas getting cleaned and I turned around to see a third Manta coming in, eye level, and straight at me. If I hadn't ducked, I would have gotten rammed. So I took two quick shots of the approach and then leaned back as the Manta belly passed inches in front of my mask. It's quite a humbling experience to have such a close encounter with such a large, gentle, and magnificent creature and from such a close & unique vantage point.

We did an incredible shark feed too, but you'll have to go to the website to read about that. In fact, you can read the full trip report (this is an abbreviated version) plus look at all the pictures by going to our website and clicking on the links on the home page.

All I can say is that I love going to Yap. Great diving, great experiences, friendly people, value for the money, and definitely a place that should be on your list of places that you want to go diving. (Maybe even with us when we return to Yap & MRB next year.)

## DIVING VACATIONS

**Aug. 30 - Sept. 12 • Indonesia**

**October 11-18 - Sea of Cortez**

**February, 2009 - Fla Manatees**



## HEADING INTO PRIME DIVE SEASON

It's hard to think of it this way sometimes, but August through November frequently offers some of the best diving we see here in SoCal.

During August, we can usually count on fairly calm seas which make the outer islands (Clemente & SBI) very accessible. In fact when we were on Clemente's backside July 26, we enjoyed a very calm and smooth ride over and back.

As we get into the fall, the water continues to warm up, especially if the Santa Anas kick in. In fact, peak water temps are usually found sometime in mid-October. We also start getting very good vis - again thanks to the Santa Anas - because it blows dirty water off-shore which brings in deeper, cleaner water.

And the good conditions persist easily into November. In fact, water temps in November generally match those of September (the water doesn't really start cooling down significantly until after Christmas) and it's not unusual to

## UPCOMING BOAT DIVES

Sun	Aug. 10	<i>Magician</i>	•• Oil Rigs (adv. dive) ••	\$135/145
Sat	23	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	150/160
Sat	Sept. 6	<i>Magician</i>	Catalina (West End)	130/140
Sun	21	<i>Magician</i>	<i>Olympic</i> wreck/Catalina	130/140
Sat	Oct. 4	<i>Cee Ray</i>	Farnsworth/Catalina back	140/150
Sun	19	<i>Great Escape</i>	San Clemente (frontside)	150/160
Sat	Nov. 1	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	150/160
Sun	16	<i>Magician</i>	•• Oil Rigs (adv. dive) ••	135/145

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.

get 100'+ vis days even into December.

So make sure you don't miss out on all the fun. Remember that our format is that we dive every other week. (And we'll probably continue that pattern in 2009.) Plus we try to alternate between Saturdays and Sundays and rotate around which destination we go to so it's not the same-old same-old all the time.

Give us a call at 310/652-4990 to join is on the fun. We've been having some great dive experiences this year and there's no reasons you should be enjoying it with us.

## REEF SAVER CARDS

I also seem to think everyone's aware of this but I guess I don't do as good a job of reminding you about Reef Saver Cards as I should. So here goes.

The Reef Saver Card works the same way it does when we had a retail storefront. You pay \$50 for an individual card (\$80 for a couple so it's good for both people) and for the next 365 days following your purchase, you'll receive a

10% discount off of any local trip, or any parts for repairs that you have Robert do. (The discount does not apply to staterooms or fuel surcharges on local trips, repair labor, and doesn't apply to foreign trips.)

But the bottom line is that if you're going to spend \$500 a year with Reef Seekers - which is really only three or four local trips - it will pay for you to have the card because you'll save more in the aggregate than the card will cost you.

I try to remember to pitch the card when we talk on the phone but it's not a perfect system. I'm usually decent at getting to people who have expired because I get a computer prompt, but some of the newbies slip by me.

So feel free to ask next time if you've got a valid Reef Saver Card and if not, let's get you one. It'll save you some money and with this economy, that's always good.



## PHOTO TIPS

People frequently ask me how they can take better pictures. If you can remember two words, you can likely vastly improve your photography. Those two words are: (1) Closer, and (2) Lower.

Getting closer to your subject has numerous advantages. First of all, it puts your flash in range of your subject. I get photos from folks all the time asking me why the pictures are all blue. The answer is simple: You're too far away for your flash to be effective.

On point-and-shoot cameras with on-board built-in flashes, you're probably not going to get much more than 5-7' of throw on the flash. So if you're farther away than that, the pictures take on a

bluish cast. Closer means you have more flash to work with.

Closer also means your subject will be larger in frame. This is especially useful when you're shooting even medium-sized objects like a Kelp Bass or perhaps a Garibaldi. And you've likely got a better chance of having the animal glance your way, which IMHO always makes for a better picture.

As a rule of thumb, get at least as close to the subject as you can reach with your outstretched arm. That's going to be maybe a maximum of three feet. Give it a try on your next dive and don't shoot anything that's more than three feet away and see what you think.

The second idea, lower, means just that. You want to at least be on eye

level with the animal and sometimes below. This can give you an upward-looking shot that can be very dramatic.

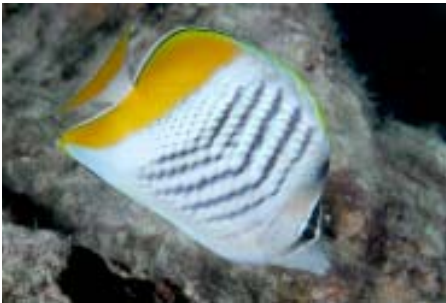
Now this "lower" idea doesn't always work 100% of the time. When shooting Hammerheads and Crocodilefish, I happen to like to be above them if I can because you see more of their irregular shape. But the technique of "lower" will work most of the time. And the reality is that if you normally shoot at a 45° angle above everything and you simply reduce that to a 15° angle above everything, you'll notice an improvement.

So give these two simple things a try and let me know how it works out for you. I think you'll be pleased with the results of the shots that you get..

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## PICTURE PAGE - Yap - July, 2008

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2008)



**Yellowback  
Butterfly**



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[WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM](http://WWW.REEFSEEKERS.COM)



**Really pretty  
(and large) Nudibranch**



**Juvenile  
Yellowtail Coris**



**Manta gliding in  
to get cleaned**



**Reef Shark  
close encounter**