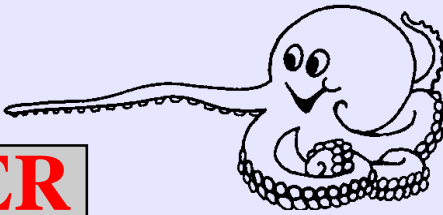


THE REEF SEEKER



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June - 2010



BONAIRE 2010 TRIP MINI-REPORT

What's NOT to like about Bonaire? The diving's very good and reliable, it's relatively easy to get to, it's not all that expensive, and they speak English. 2010 marked (I think) our eighth trip to Bonaire staying at Buddy Dive, one of the larger operations on Bonaire and our resort of choice for many years now.

And we LOVED the rooms we had this year, two 2-bedroom ground-floor apartments. Each unit has an enormous open room that serves as living room, entertainment area (small TV with cable), full kitchen with refrigerator & stove, and dining area. That opens out on to a nice-sized covered patio. Put all together, it was ample room, especially when you add in space required for cameras, laptops, stray gear, and the like and we were delighted.

One of the things we've always liked about Buddy's is the efficiency and logistics of the dive operation, run by good friend

Augusto Montbrun. They've got a large and attentive staff, there are always plenty of tanks available, there's a large gear storage area right on the dock, the boats are easy to sign up for and well-posted, and the whole thing runs amazingly well.

We always book on what they call the "Dive & Drive" package which includes your room, breakfast daily, a 50% discount on other meals at Buddy's that are charged to your room (max \$75 off), all diving, and a vehicle. Although you can enjoy Bonaire without a vehicle, it's advantageous to have one because you can now drive in to town, tour the island, or hit other shore-based spots. So we like the fact that we get a truck with each of our rooms.

Having the truck gave us mobility and enabled us to dive some of the shore sites Bonaire is so famous for. Over the course of the week, we went to Alice In Wonderland, Andrea II, and Jeannie's Glory, plus made numerous dives on the Buddy Dive house reef.

Jeannie's was a new one for us. It's just north of the Salt Pier. That's important because you are no longer permitted to dive the Salt Pier without a guide (allegedly for security reasons) which also means you're going to pay \$35/head for the privilege of do-

ing it. Salt Pier is a fantastic dive, but I didn't feel like shelling out \$35 for it.

So we dove Jeannie's instead, kicked out to the reef dropoff, and turned south. Jeannie's in and of itself was a lush, lovely dive. And it just so happened that our turning point of the dive was the north end of the Salt Pier, where we found four Tarpon, a couple of Barracudas, many schools of Grunts and Snappers, and a host of other fish. So we sort of got the best of both worlds, albeit the latter slightly on the sly.

Much as we like the shore sites, don't ever forget that many of the reefs off of the hotels are also excellent sites. Buddy's Reef is excellent, as is Bari Reef (adjacent to the south off of Sand Dollar), and the same goes for Scientifico/Captain Don's, adjacent to the north of Buddy's Reef. So you've got a stretch of maybe 400 yards of simply excellent diving, with Buddy's Reef being smack dab in the middle.

We did a dusk shore dive at Buddy's almost every day. The dusk dives, regardless of whether we went left or right, were always very good. But on Wednesday night, it was spectacular.

We seemingly caught the reef at just the right moment, during the afternoon "bite" when all the ani-

mals are trying to get in a final snack, or a final cleaning, or whatever before they settle in for the night.

We started the dive noticing that there was an ever-flowing river of Creole Wrasses, perhaps 8-10 abreast, flying and flitting with their pectoral fins from the south to the north. It was like watching the 405. The stream of fish never seemed to end. I have no idea how many there were but 100,000 wouldn't surprise me. They just kept coming and coming and coming. And every now and then, a few of them would break out of the traffic to find some juvy Spanish Hogfish or other cleaner fish, go into the classic head-down/lips-out cleaning position, and get a quick makeover.

On top of all of that, there were thousands and thousand of Scisortail Damsels darting about, many Parrotfish crunching on the reef, Arrow Crabs and small shrimp in the crevices, Bar Jacks on the prowl, Trumpetfish hanging vertically in the soft corals trying to look inconspicuous, and all sort of activity. We could have done this dive alone and been happy campers. And to top it all off, on the kick back in over the shallows, we found a juvy French Angelfish (which I happen to think are especially cute).

We topped it off the next night (Thursday) with a similar dive on the same reef (not quite as frantic as the night before) but where we encountered a not-usually-seen Midnight Parrotfish. These guys are generally enormous, probably the largest of the Parrotfish, and this particular one had to be four feet long. Usually they're quite skittish and hard too approach but

this one sort of hung with us for a while, crunched coral to his heart's delight, and didn't flee when approached slowly. (You can see the results of this in the photos from this trip.)

And that brings up another good diving point. Note the key word in that last paragraph: SLOWLY.

As many of you know, I work as a volunteer diver at the Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach. The animals are (obviously) very accustomed to have divers around them. But even under those circumstances, we try to move SLOWLY so as not to spook the animals.

That same advice and skill set can work wonders for you in the open ocean when you're dealing with wild animals who are not always comfortable seeing divers. You want to move slowly and in a non-threatening manner, and you'll get much better animal experiences overall. And remember that things like making constant eye contact may be perceived by the animal to be a threat, so a glance every now and then as the animal get accustomed to you may work better.

Be aware that the fish think the most disturbing thing you do is

exhale. So do your best to contain your enthusiasm and exhale slowly (there's that word again) and gently. I will even at times (perish the thought) hold my breath when the animal and I are very close so as not to spook it.

Our general plan over the course of the week was two boat dives, a beach/shore dive, and a dusk dive each day. I've always found the diving in Bonaire to be very good, but not necessarily best-dive-ever spectacular. But I think it was a bit better this year than in past years. Water temp hung around 82°, vis was 60-100 feet (though in some spots on a few occasions it dropped to 30 and got a little milky), the fish were plentiful, and the reefs were very healthy.

We had a great time overall and I'm working on completing the full trip report this week along with pictures and maybe even (keep your fingers crossed) a slide show. All of this will be posted on our Reef Seekers website and I'll send you a separate e-mail when it's ready to go if you're on our e-mailing list. If Bonaire's not already on your list of places that you want to go dive, make sure to add it because you'll have a great time.

2010 DIVING VACATIONS

July 9-18 • Yap

August 2-6 • Channel Islands

Sept. 12-18 • Flower Gardens

AUGUST 5-DAY TRIP

We're getting very excited about our upcoming 5-day trip on the *Great Escape* August 2-6. Basically, it's going to present us with a unique opportunity to explore the Southern Channel Islands like never before.

A lot of times we don't realize what world-class diving we have right at our doorstep. We intend to take advantage of the luxury of a 5-day schedule to explore the best these islands have to offer. The general plan is:

SUNDAY NIGHT - Board, paperwork, briefing

MONDAY - Catalina (Italian Gardens, Ship Rock, etc.)

TUESDAY - Santa Barbara Island (Sea Lions & more)

WEDNESDAY - San Nicolas & Begg Rock (incredible diving)

THURSDAY - San Clemente Island (much to choose from)

FRIDAY - Farnsworth & Catalina backside (great way to end)

We'll plan on being back in San Pedro around 5PM on Friday. And we'll structure each day to offer five (or maybe even six) dives with planned surface intervals that will allow us time to fill tanks, feed you, conduct fish IDs and look at photos, brief on the next dive site, and stuff like that. This is the same type of sked we run on foreign trips and when you think about it, this trip is really a week-long vacation without the need to get on an airplane to enjoy it.

Total cost of the trip is \$1249, which includes a \$100/diver tip for the crew already built in. If you're a Reef Saver or a member of an affiliated dive club, there's a \$25 discount which drops your

UPCOMING BOAT & SHORE DIVES

Sat	June 5	Redondo	Redondo Canyon (day dive)	\$5/10
Sun	13	<i>Cat. Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	95/100
Wed	16	Redondo	Night dive	5/10
Sat	26	<i>Great Escape</i>	Santa Barbara Island	145/150
Wed	July 7	Redondo	Night dive	5/10
Sun	25	<i>Cat. Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	95/100
August 2-6 <i>Great Escape</i> 5-DAY TRIP!!				\$1249
Wed.	11	Redondo	Night dive	5/10

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.

price down to \$1224. (If you'd like to reserve a stateroom for yourself, add another \$50.) Also remember that this is a limited load, with no more than 20 paid divers onboard. There will also be four DMs, and six *Great Escape* crew.

In addition to all of that, we'll have opportunity to offer some extra classes during the trip. We'll definitely do both a NAUI & PADI Advanced course and might also add Fish ID, Rescue, or other extra courses that might strike your fancy.

The trip is starting to fill but we've still got spaces available and would love to add your name. It's shaping up to be a really great week diving the best SoCal sites in a leisurely and unhurried manner. Join in on the fun by calling us at 310/652-4990 and get signed up.

GREAT NEW DEVICE

No, this isn't a belated April Fool's joke . . .

We saw a great product at the recent Scuba Show and it's one of those things that when you see it, you say, "Why didn't we think of this years ago?" It comes from a

company called Scuba Stik and it's a valve indicator (called "The Vindicator" - sounds more like a WWF wrestler) that quite simply is red when your tank valve is off and green when your tank valve is fully turned on. Best of all it's pretty cheap (\$20) and can be fitted on just about any tank valve on the market.

I will be the first to tell you that on every trip of ours, we usually catch one or two of you at the gate when you've forgotten to turn your air on. And that can definitely pose a dangerous situation. The Vindicator solves that. In my opinion, it ought to be required equipment on every tank. (In fact, XS Scuba has a similar product that they now offer standard on all tanks or valves produced by XS Scuba.)

I'm going to try to make arrangements to become a dealer for these valve handles if no one else in town picks them up. This will be something that we can install on your own tank in a few minutes while you wait and the tank doesn't even have to be empty. If you've like to see a short video on the valve, go to this website: <http://www.scubastik.com/vindicator.htm>. And if you have any questions, give me a call.

TWO OTHER GREAT DIVE VACATIONS

We've got two other great trips scheduled for 2010 for those of you looking for a unique vacation.

The first one is September 12-18 when we're going to visit the Flower Gardens in the Gulf of Mexico. Now, I know what you're thinking: "Why do I want to go diving in the middle of an oil spill?" A fair enough concern except that the spill is hundreds of miles to the east of the Flower Gardens which are not - at this point - affected by the oil. Obviously, that's a situation we're monitoring very closely and if for any reason the situation changes, we will cancel the trip if necessary and refund every penny to you. So hopefully that's not

going to be an issue because this is an area where we've wanted to go for a number of years and it's rare for them to allow a charterer to offer a 5-day trip. (Most of their trips are 2- or 3-day affairs.)

The other trip is our annual sojourn down to the Sea of Cortez, this year scheduled for October 9-16 (Saturday to Saturday, due to airline schedules). The trip's unusually wide open right now (many years, we're fully-booked at this point) so we've definitely got room for you.

Plus we've got a slight wrinkle this year in that Alaska/Horizon Airlines want us to have everyone ticketed by July 9 to take advantage of the group rate we've gotten. This doesn't mean you can't book on later, but it may mean that

the price will change due to higher airfares. So if you want to get the best price on a fabulous trip, we need to get you signed up before I leave for Yap (also on July 9).

But no matter what your interests or budget, we've got a trip for you. (Easter Island & Florida Manatees will lead off 2011.) Give us a call and let us know what works for you and let's take you diving!!!

JUNE DIVING

We've also got a really great schedule of diving activities planned for June. Check out page 3 to see what fits your interest and pocketbook. Call us at 310/652-4990 and join us underwater soon!!!

PICTURE PAGE - BEAUTIFUL BONAIRE

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2010)



Long-lure Frogfish
(note the white "lure")



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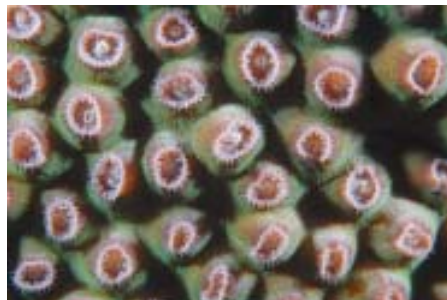
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Green Sea Turtle
& Di Krall



Juvy
Three-spot Damselfish



Coral polyps
starting to open at dusk



Tamar Toister &
Elephant Ear Sponge