



KOMODO FAM TRIP JULY 2009

Flight route on Cathay Pacific:
Bellingham-Seattle-Los Angeles-Hong Kong-
Bali-Bima

Day One-departure day July 27, 2009

The morning did not start out well as when I arrived at the Bellingham terminal for my first flight, the ticket agent informed me that my flight was cancelled. Could my trip really be starting out this way? What are my options? How am I going to get there? After some serious debating it looks like my only option at this point is to drive to Seattle and catch the second leg. This is not how Bob had seen his day shaping up, but he was a good sport. It has to be one of the hottest days of the year and we are traveling in a car with no air conditioning. Nothing like sweating your ass off before you even get on a flight-not how I pictured my adventure starting. Fortunately, traffic was moving and we arrived at the airport in time. Nothing like a good bloody Mary to calm the nerves! My flight to LA goes off without a hitch and now I am just sitting waiting to meet up with my new traveling companions.

Day 2-3 July 29 Hong Kong airport

After a 14 hour flight with a lot of bumps along the way I have finally made it to Hong Kong. I still haven't met any of my group, but I'm sure I should see some familiar faces from the last flight as I head to the gate of the next flight. At the security check point I see a gal rolling a bag that has a scuba symbol on it and I ask if she is part of a group heading to Komodo. She says yes and finally I have connected with the first of the group, her name is Michelle. She introduces me to Bill, Nick, Terry and Sandy. Finally, it feels like I am on my way. We have 5 hours to kill so of course everyone jumps on their laptops and starts emailing. So, me being electronically challenged attempt to do the same thing. Bob has covered all the details with me, so away I go. I get on line and successfully send out an email to the store and then I text message Bob that I am alive. Off to the next leg, which is our flight to Bali, it is only another 4:45 hours. Can't wait to get there!



We land in Bali and are met by a gentleman named Jack who hands us our visas, he then points us to a line that we need to wait in to go through customs and immigration. There are hundreds of people in this area as I think five or more planes have all arrived at once, it is sheer chaos! The line is not moving and it is hot, we are not liking this one bit after traveling for 36 hours! It took about an hour fifteen to finally make it through the line. I thought we were supposed to be fast tracked through this line, which Jack explains that's what used to happen, but since the bombing in Jakarta the week before we got there, no such luck. He says next time we fly in it will probably be back to normal. We gather up luggage, which I am happy to see that both my bags have made it. We are greeted with beautiful flower leis, which is great to cover the smell of 36 hours of travel. As we exit the airport there is an entire row of money changers, make sure to change your money here for Rupiah. We then load in the van and head for the Beji Ubud Resort, oh and it's an hour ride away.....groan. We have the driver make a quick stop at a circle K for a cold Bintang beer to help the drive go faster. Finally, we arrive at the resort, it is small and beautiful. We are given the keys to our rooms and quickly head off to



take a shower. My roommate is Michelle and as we open the door we discover that there is only one big bed. We quickly ask the girl what our options are and she says that if one of us want to sleep in the

"traditional" Bali room it is open. I look over my shoulder and it looks like a tree house. We head over to check it out and it looks do-able so I volunteer to move. It's all open, no doors to lock, climb the stairs and there is your bed. At this point who cares, it's a bed and I am ready for some horizontal time. Quick bite to eat and off I go. Good night!

Day 4 July 30 Touring Bali

I awake to the symphony of roosters and chickens, what more is there to say. I slept like a rock and am now headed downstairs to my outdoor shower to get ready for my day. It quickly wakes me up as I don't think there is any hot water, I can certainly say it was refreshing! After breakfast we load onto the bus and away we go for a full day of touring. First stop is a temple in Ubud that is getting ready for a very



big festival that happens once every 25 years. We have to wear a traditional sarong, which they wrap you in at the front gate area before we can enter. Jack our tour guide explains all the rituals that each person performs and how they are preparing for this big day. Next we are off to a local art gallery, this place is filled with beautiful paintings of both the old traditional and the newer modern ways of painting. Next stop, the wood carving gallery. The carvings are incredible and quite large, I do however find a nice mask to add to our collection. Time for lunch and we make a stop at "Tasiman" restaurant



that overlooks a small river. There is no menu the food just arrives in different courses. It is wonderful along with a couple of ice cold Bintang (local beer). The Monkey Forest is the stop after lunch which is



filled with Macaque monkeys. They are everywhere and as usual ready to grab anything that is loose that they think they can eat. Great photo ops. Hop on the bus and back to the middle of town to visit the local market. This is a shoppers paradise, it was very overwhelming, but incredible to walk through and just do some people watching. The last



stop is about an hour bus ride away called "Tahan Lot" which is a beautiful temple built out on the water. A must see at sunset. We wound our way through what I would consider to be the country side, through all the terraced rice paddies. What felt like forever, we finally arrived at the ocean (along with every tourist in Bali) to view the temples at sunset. What a gorgeous setting! There was some clouds



on the horizon so we didn't get to see the entire sunset, but what we did see was worth coming for. Back on the bus for the long ride home, it will be an early morning as we are off to the airport for our flight to Bima.

Day 5: Flying to Bima

The day began very early about 4:00 am, I woke up and decided to head to my ice cold shower outside, that woke me up! We load on the bus at about 7:00 and take the hour drive to the airport. An agent meets us there to help with getting our luggage on the plane with the least amount of over luggage fees. You do need 30,000 Rupiah departure fee to get out (no credit cards, or US money). It's chaotic as usual at these airports, but our guide is working hard to get the price down. You then walk across to pay the fee then come back to the counter to prove you paid then they will give you a boarding pass. The guide shuffles us quickly to the next line to pay our departure tax and then were done. They say the carry on limit is 11 lbs, but no one checked that weight, just the checked luggage weight. It is a quick 45 minute flight to Bima, which goes off without a hitch. We meet Frank, part owner of the World Wide Dive & Sail company and the S/Y P Siren. Grab our luggage and we are on our way to the boat. We ended up taken some side roads due to the town being shut down and it is not a pretty sight. Plastic is alive and well and there is garbage everywhere. It is very dirty and poverty stricken, not a place you would want to walk around. It's an easy transfer to the boat, which is



absolutely beautiful. Frank gives us a briefing and introduces his crew

which is like his family. This trip is going to be incredible! Our room is one of the biggest I have ever seen on a live aboard and the bathroom is huge! Did I mention the espresso machine? After a quick tour of the vessel we gear up for our first dive which is basically a check out dive in the muck. Great macro, bad vis, typical of muck diving. As we return to the boat, Michael has hot tea or cold beer on a tray ready for you. Can it really get any better than this? After cleaning up, dinner is served along with dessert, the chefs do a great job and everyone is happy. It's been a long day, time to call it a night.

Day 6 First real day of diving

The boat picked up anchor at 3:00 am to move to our next diving spot. We arrive at Saneang Island for our first full day of diving. The dives here are a mix of muck (black sand) and coral bommies. The animals found here would rival Lembeh and PNG. The third dive of the day was called "hot rocks" as hot sulfur water bubbles out of the black sand like



a Jacuzzi. This is also a hot macro spot for Pygmy Seahorses which we did find, not just one but several on one sea fan. We are now motoring for our night moorage and night dive at Banta Island. Upon our arrival another boat (Seven Seas) beat us to the dive site. We try and coordinate dive time so we are not all in the water at one time. It's going to be a late one. The dive produces lots of Eels out hunting, devilfish, lionfish, small cuttlefish, snake eels and more. We return to the boat for dinner and it is now 10:00 pm. Time to eat, then more sleep.

Day 7

The weather is favorable and the wind is calm so we decide to head south right away or we might not be able to dive it later. We are now in the Komodo National Park, the land is very dry and barren, not the



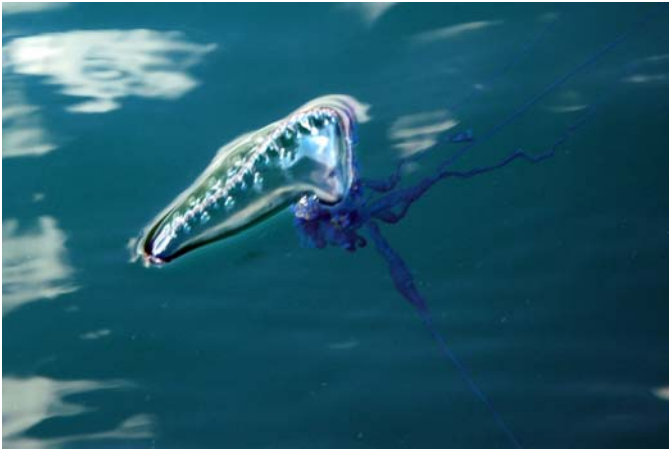
lush green you would expect. We pull into a cove to do the first dive and there are three other boats here as well. I never thought it would be so crowded, all the other boats dump their divers on top of the same dive site. Our drivers take us to another pinnacle to stay away from all the people. The dive is good with current and tons of fish life, several white tip reef sharks and Travalley out hunting. Back for breakfast and we are moving on to get away from all the other live-aboards. Hot and sunny today, better make sure to have enough sun screen on. We continue to travel south as the wind is still favorable. The diving continues to be great and we are still moving and we need to make the dusk dive for the Mandarin fish. Only Lance and I decide to do the dive, so they load us in the dingy and we head across the rough water at mach 9. I'm surprised we stayed in the boat! We make it to the bay in time and drop down. We finally find the Mandarins but they are not inclined to come out and mate tonight. It is getting to be close to the full moon and I think it is too bright. We continue on the dive and find all kinds of great critters. I have 3 private guides all looking for animals. We come back to the boat, have some dinner, couple of cold Carlsberg and call it a night.

Day 8:

This morning we are headed for a walk with the Komodo Dragons. We arrive at "Komodo Island" and are greeted by the local Macaque Monkeys. The trail takes us to the ranger station where two rangers



will guide us on the trail around the park. Before we even reach the rangers we spot a Komodo Dragon coming up from the dry river bed. They are huge. He is watching us closely as we keep our distance. There are two rangers, one in the front of the group and one in the back armed with only a forked stick for protection. As we climb the hill it is a beautiful view of the surrounding islands and the bay. Along the trail we encounter a small female blocking the pathway, we snap a few pictures and make a detour around her. We encounter several more along the way and one even gets up and starts heading towards us and the ranger quickly steps in and is ready with stick in hand as he calmly says "walk quickly around, do not run" the group does as they are told and we move on down the trail. Upon our return to the boat, breakfast is waiting and we continue motoring towards the South. Our first dive was scheduled for noon, but Frank has decided that we are going for it before the winds pick up any more. I have to say that this vessel does not move that much even in a decent swell, which is really nice when you are prone to seasickness. We arrive in the bay which is still quite breezy but calm water. We quickly gear up for the first dive of the day called "Cannibal Rock". It is spectacular and probably one of the most colorful dives I have ever done. It is like a rainbow of color underwater-this dive should be named "Technicolor Rock". When we head back to the boat the guides are all looking at the water and pointing saying "bubbles, bubbles". Finally we figure out what they are looking at what happens to be Portuguese Man a war jellyfish all over the place. They are not big, I would say the largest one I saw was 6 inches long, but there are a lot of them. I jump in the dinghy to get



close to the water to try and get a shot of one. Their tentacles wrap around everything that is in the water. Michelle tries to help me bring one in closer that is wrapped around a line and unfortunately a piece of tentacle attaches to her arm. We are quick with the vinegar and JellyFish Squish product, but it is swelling quickly. Lesson here, never mess around with these jellyfish! In between the dives Frank tells us about putting video cameras on the beach baited with chicken so the Komodo Dragons come right up to the cameras. Of course we are all game for this one, so we load on the boat, chicken in hand, cameras ready as we head into the beach. Several people jump out to get cameras placed, when one of the guides yell that there is a dragon right up the hill hiding in the grass. Now we are really on our toes as this dragon is much closer than we wanted. Everyone quickly gets camera's in place, chicken tossed about when the dragon comes running down the hill. There is another one farther down the beach



which now is running towards us. The rest of us are waiting in the boat right off shore, as the rest of the group comes out to join us. It is crazy! They devour the chicken in one gulp and quickly start looking for more. As soon as they are out, they head straight for us. Frank keeps throwing chicken behind them to keep them away from us, but eventually we have no more, and we need to move away from the beach. What an adrenaline rush! And there is incredible footage to prove it. They were certainly more close than even the ones we saw this morning at the park. Time for more diving. We make the night

dive at Cannibal Rock and it is even better than the day dive.



Absolutely amazing! The water temp in the south is quite a bit cooler, down into the 70's, as everyone has now layered up with everything they brought. Back to the boat for a late dinner and off to bed.

Day 9:

The sun is shining and we are planning to do three more dives in the south bay. We are the only boat to make it here as it is too rough of a crossing for the others, as they waited too late in the day. We have the place to ourselves which is very nice. Part of the group goes to the beach to plant their videos again for some Komodo Dragon footage. The rest of us opt to do another dive. The footage from the beach is better than the day before as two of them are fighting right in front of the camera. We finish our third dive and have to head back to Komodo Island, the crossing will be rough as we have both wind and current moving in opposite directions. Michelle's arm is quite swollen today from the jellyfish sting, here forearm looks like a sausage. On the crossing the worst part was towards the end we hit about 6-7 ft swells which luckily we were going with the waves so it was not as bad as we had anticipated. We pull into a cove to moor for the evening and do a dive in the bay at Phinisi Wreck. At least it is an earlier evening dinner at 8:30 pm instead of 10:00. Off to bed as tomorrow morning we anticipate the Manta dive, weather permitting.

Day 10:

We pull anchor and head around the corner to the famous "Manta Alley". There is a good swell this morning as the wind had continued to blow all night. We take the only mooring in the bay and get ready for the dive. I think we had three different Mantas on the first dive and two huge ones on the second. The wind is holding so we go for the third dive, which is the wise decision as this is the best Manta Dive yet.



We had lots of Mantas and they kept coming and circling around so everyone got a show. Always beautiful to watch. We are a couple hours cruise from the next dive site which we have already visited once before called Pantai merah (pink Beach). We opt to do a late afternoon dive instead of the night dive. Of course we find the Sea Ladybugs, a painted frogfish AND a Blue ringed Octopus and I have wide angle on! After the dive, we pull anchor and travel a couple of hours to our night mooring.

Day 11:

Our first dive of the morning will be a drift dive. It can be challenging so we need to pay attention. We jump in and this dive is incredible! The orange soft corals are beautiful! Towards the end of the dive, the



current picks up speed and wants to pull you off the reef. Then a few seconds later it comes to a screeching halt and that is the end of the

dive. The second dive is at a place we had already been to, but we are doing the opposite side. A few minutes after we drop in and a large Manta comes swimming by in the blue. This side is an incredible wall, with unique rock formations and swim thru's. A Bamboo shark goes sliding by as well as a big Napoleon Wrasse. Third dive is the Lighthouse, which was a drift, but unfortunately there was no current. Not too much in the way of action. We move another hour and are now at the evening dive spot. The next dive is "Shotgun", on this dive you enter in the bay before the narrow channel as the current shoots you thru at a very fast pace. As we enter the area the guides say that there is no current, but for my taste it is plenty as we still enjoy shooting from 50 ft to 25ft in a blink of an eye. As you are traveling thru the narrow channel it is scrubbed pretty clean with lot's of fish action in between. I can't imagine this dive with more current, but apparently tomorrow we are going to give it another try. Time for dinner and it is a beautiful evening with a full moon out tonight.

Day 12:

The diving starts out early as we are back at Grand Central Station with all the other boats and we want the dive site to ourselves. We are diving Castle Rock with big fish and shark action. Our plan went off without a hitch we had the dive site to ourselves for at least ½ hour before the rest show up. The clouds have moved in today with a slight breeze, we'll hope for more sun this afternoon. Second dive was Crystal Rock, an identical pinnacle to Castle Rock again with big fish action. The third dive the group was divided as ½ decided to do Shotgun and the other half went to Crystal Rock. The current was going to be stronger this time so I opted to do Crystal Rock instead.



This was the best decision as it had to have been one of the most incredible dives I have ever done. The fish action was non stop! I have never seen the sun blocked by so many fish in the water column. It was crazy the moment we dropped down. The Trevally and Tuna hunting kept all the small fish whirling about. After about 40 minutes of pure action we head for the backside of the pinnacle to rest. Unfortunately, once we were around the back there was really nothing

going on so we decided to finish the dive. Upon surfacing the current was boiling as we were giving high fives each other on such an incredible dive. This dive had to be one of the best so far! We return to the boat and get underway as the crew hoists all the sails on the boat.



It is an incredible sight as we jump in the dinghy to get some photographs. After a couple of hours we reach our destination for the evening and the crew brings down the sails and get ready for anchoring. This is where the night dive is called "Coral Gardens". Nothing really great is discovered on the night dive, a few macro critters, but nothing super noteworthy. Time for dinner and a few Carlsbergs and it's off to bed as another great day comes to an end.

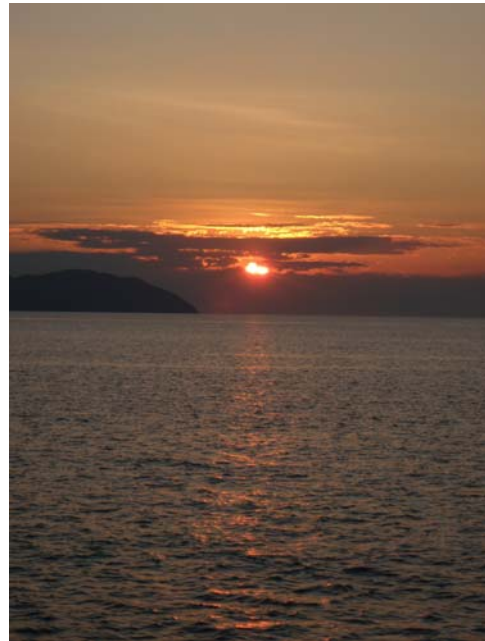
Day 13:

It's a little roly this morning with a swell coming in to the bay. Wake up call is early this morning as we get ready to do "the circus" macro dive. We were lucky to find two Stargazers next to each other in the



sand. The second dive on the schedule is one called "roller coaster" due to the currents off the point. Little did we know what we were in for. I have never been in currents like this before. It was a quick drift to start and then we hit a point where the current slams you from 80ft to 30ft in a blink of an eye, oh yes, and did I say I was upside down? Hanging on for dear life with my camera dragging me around up and

down it was every person for themselves. At one point I thought I was going to lose my mask. I can't make it out of the cut where the current is like a tornado going round and round. I decide I have to bail. I try to go up and the current is pulling me down, I'm in 25 ft of water fully inflated and hanging on to whatever I can get my hand on. I briefly think of letting my camera go as I need both hands to climb up the reef. What seems like an eternity I finally surface breathing like a freight train and I still have my camera in hand. I try to swim out from the boiling water and rocks and hit my dive alert at the same time. The boats can't see me stuck in this cut, but they finally hear me and come to my rescue. My hands are shaking, but I am in one piece and happy to be headed back to the boat. My entire dive was 15 minutes, but felt like an eternity. I will chalk this dive up to one of the two scariest dives I have ever done. I will mark this one in my logbook to never do again. In defense of the dive crew they did tell us what it was going to be like, but I had never imagined it to be anything like it was. Adrenaline Junkies this dive is for you! A couple of people enjoyed the ride, but best to be done without a large camera system. For the third and last dive of the day we head back to Sangeang to do an easy wall dive with little or no current. It is a nice dive with black sand just at the base of the volcano. The evening is beautiful with sails up and the sun setting



on the horizon. I then spot dolphins and pilot whales passing us by as we try and do a quick u-turn, but they never did surface again. We make our way back towards Bima where we will do two muck dives in the morning. Had an absolute beautiful sunset this evening enjoying cold Carlsberg up on the deck.

Day 14:

Today is our last dive day so we only have two muck dives and we are already close to Bima Harbor. The muck dives are really good and would rival Lembeh for small critters. On the last dive, we pretty much



find everything on the list even a Mimic Octopus which I only saw as it's head went down in the sand. After 90 minutes we come back for lunch and a little down time before packing. Frankie & Shawn pop for the gas for the inflatable and we head out to do a little water skiing. It



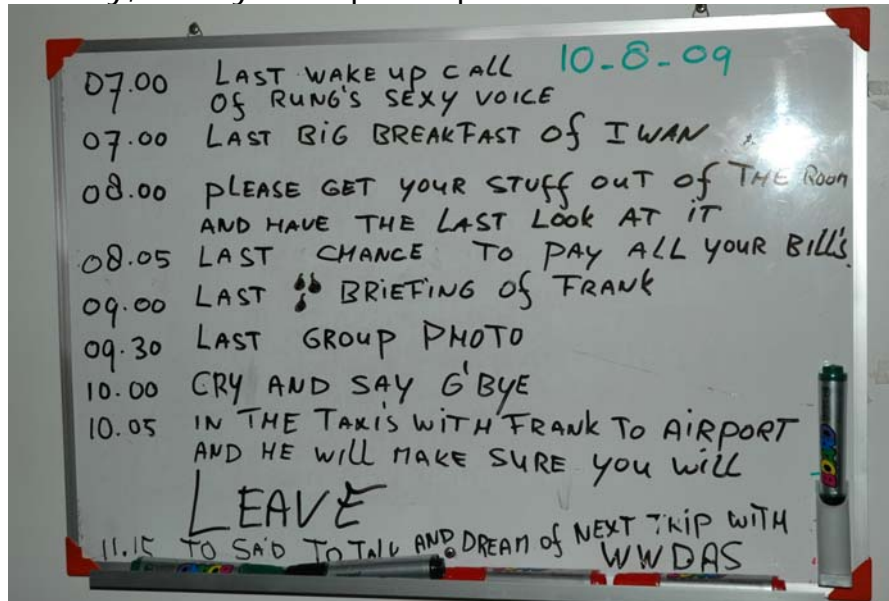
is a blast and a great way to spend an hour. We all ski and take a few turns around the boat. Time to get serious and start packing up the camera and dive gear. Meanwhile, the boat has lifted anchor and we are motoring to Bima Harbor. It is loud with boat engines and a very busy harbor, this certainly snaps you back into reality. Tonight is the big photo contest and everyone is taking home some incredible photos.



It was great fun to relive the trip before we have even disembarked. It's getting late, the bar is busy with last minute drinks before finishing the final pack tomorrow morning. I make my last toast and sneak off to bed.

Day 15:

This morning comes fast as it will be the last time we here from Rung "wakey, wakey". We pack up the rest of our stuff and head upstairs for



breakfast and espresso. Time to settle up the bill, no credit cards taken so make sure you bring enough cash. You will need 11,000 Rupiah to depart out of Bima and it is 150,000 Rupiah to depart Denpasar, Bali. This departure tax changes, so have extra just in case. We arrive and Frank heads up the group to check us in, little do we know at the time that only 10 of the 16 of us have seats on the flight. Frank has quite a bit of pull and starts talking the rest of us back on the flight. Unfortunately for the 6 surfers that showed up behind our group, they did not make it on. This apparently is pretty standard with Merpati Airlines and if you don't get on the flight there is not another one until the next day. And from the looks of Bima, I don't think the hotel accommodations would be very good. They do hit us up for all the overweight luggage fees, which we are all happy to pay since we made it on the flight. Next we head to pay the departure tax which is now 21,000 rupiah, always good to have extra as they don't take any other currency. We bid farewell to Frank as our plane has landed which means the next dive group has arrived and Frank has to meet and greet. They turn around the boat in 3 hours! We arrive in Bali and Jack is there to meet us with the bus and we



head to the Ramada Bintang, this hotel is 10 minutes from the airport. It's about 2:00 pm and we decide to explore the famous beach of Kuta. Take a right out of the Ramada on the beach boardwalk and cruise along the beach toward the Golden Arches. This is where you will find "Poppies Lane 1 & 2". Kuta beach is a spectacular place to people watch, you have every walk of life from every country imaginable. This is a shoppers paradise, so if you haven't picked up anything yet, this is the place. We stopped along the way and had some sushi at the mall just a short walk from the Ramada. Later that night we meet up with part of the group at the Restaurant called Poppies located on Lane 1 for dinner. It has a good menu with plenty to choose from. We walk back to the hotel along the beach, which takes about 20 minutes at a brisk pace. Taxi's are also readily available which run about 20,000 rupiah (approx. \$2).

Day 16:

Breakfast is included in our stay so we make our way to the dining room. It is a huge buffet, with plenty of selection and more than you can possibly eat. After breakfast we catch a cab to Poppies Lane to get



a message and pedicure before the flight. We stop in one of the salons and a 1 hour message and pedicure runs 100,000 rupiah (\$10) you just can't beat it. Jack picks us up at 1:30 pm and were off to the airport to catch our flight to Hong Kong. After checking in, our agent takes us to the line to pay our departure tax which is 150,000 rupiah. We bid him farewell and thank him for all his hard work managing our

group through the airport. Now it's time for the worst part of the trip and that is the long flights home.

Summary:

The diving in this area of Komodo National Park is incredible. You have a wonderful mix of wide angle crystal clear blue water diving and muck diving. To make your travel go smoothly the use of local agents is critical for group travel. These guys are the ones to go to bat for you on overweight fees and getting the groups on the same flights. They make everything seem seamless and we used IndoChina Services and Jack was a fantastic guide. Having a guide and bus works great to get us to every destination we need to go to. You really do not want to drive here unless you are very experienced in this kind of free for all driving. The Philippine Siren is a beautiful boat and will be moving to the Philippines for a permanent home. The Siren which is the sister ship to the one we were on is the boat that stays in Komodo and is the boat that I have booked for October 2010. The crew was excellent, and went out of their way to make sure everything was running smoothly. Frank was a pleasure to meet and could spin a tail like no other. It had to be the best dive briefings ever, if you weren't laughing then you were crying. I would like to thank the group of Scuba Travel Ventures for putting this trip together and doing a fantastic job showing us around. Thank you Chim & Lance for being such great guides! Bali is certainly a place to spend some time in, both the mountains of Ubud and the sandy beaches of Kuta beach.

Quick note-Verizon wireless phone service is great in Bali, I could make calls and text easily from my phone, same in Hong Kong airport. We had no problem sending emails, both hotels had internet access. There is no cell service or internet access when we flew to Bima. The boat had a phone that you could use for emergency purposes.



