

# PALAU, MICRONESIA

OCTOBER 21-NOVEMBER 8, 2015

## Anacortes Diving Adventure Team



Chris, Scott, Kathy, Dale, Allison, Peggy, Bob, Russ, Mary, Marle, Phyllis, Ken, Liz, Kelley, Mike, Penny

# YAP, MICRONESIA

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Ken, Marle, Phyllis, Kathy, Kelley, Allison, Bob, Dale, Peggy, Russ, Mike, Liz

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October 21-Nov 16, 2015

Route: Vancouver BC—Seoul Korea—Palau      Traveled on: Air Canada & Korean Air

Inter-island route: Palau —Yap      Traveled on: United

Route home: Yap—Palau—Seoul Korea—Vancouver      Traveled on: United, Korean Air & Air Canada

Departure day:

I think this might be the only flight that we depart during daylight hours. Every other flight we take leaves or lands in the middle of the night. Our flight to Seoul was aboard the new Dreamliner 787 on Air Canada, really nice plane and the flight was smooth and uneventful. We had a 3 hour layover in Seoul and then a 4 ½ hour flight into Palau at which we landed at 2:30 am. Quick through immigration, pick up luggage and off we go to the Palasia Hotel. Easy check-in, no paperwork, here's your key, have a good night. The next morning after breakfast a group of us decide to wander around and see the sights close

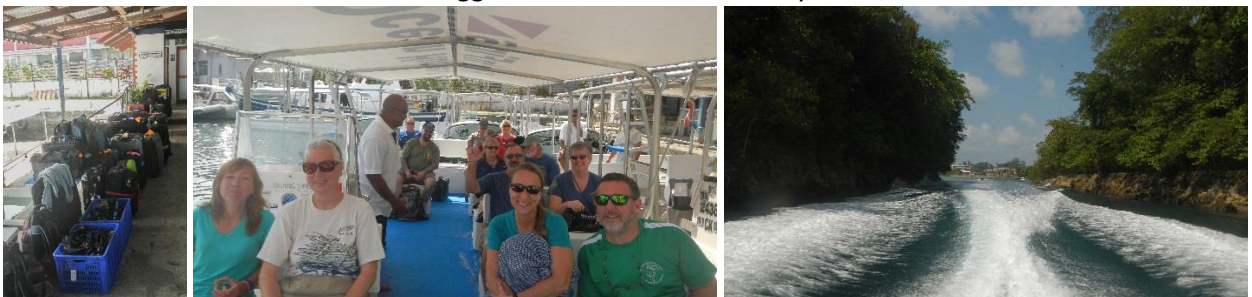


by. We walk on down to the Aquarium, a park and then we run across the Drop Off bar and I believe it is really time for a cold one. Red rooster is on tap and makes for a nice pit stop on the water. We ran across the Ocean Hunter III office and introduced ourselves and then we were close to Sam's Tours and same thing, stopped for a cold beer and then they gave us a ride back to our hotel. A quick dip in the pool when we get back and then off to forage for food. The desk gave us the name of a good Filipino place for some Lumpia and Udong. This is a very local place, great food, and cheap. That hit the spot and back at the hotel we finish the night off with a couple of drinks at the bar for Happy hour. Mike, Liz and Allison all fly in tonight at 8:00 pm but the group is fading fast so we will just have to catch up with them in the morning.

Day 2

Up early for breakfast and the group is all here. We enjoy a leisurely morning as we wait for our pick-up at 12:30 pm from the Ocean Hunter III. We will board the boat and hopefully be diving by this afternoon.

They are right on time and the ride to the office is only about 10 minutes away. We finish up final paperwork and relax as they load all the luggage on the ship. The dive store is called Fish n fins which is another part of the Ocean Hunter Group. Here they run day boats out which would be an option if you do not want to do a live-aboard. The store is well stocked with supplies if you have forgotten something at home. The dive skiff is one of the biggest I have seen and it easily takes all 18 of us out to the Ocean







Hunter. After introductions and how things work we start the process of unpacking and setting up our dive gear to get ready for a dive at 4 pm. Our check out dive will be a wreck close by



called Hafa Adei which had some life on it and good schooling fish, but really is just meant to be a checkout dive.

Everyone does great and we are back for a quick snack and then the night dive. The night dive is on the Helmet Wreck, which unfortunately the Helmets did not survive since the last time we were here 13 years ago. There are still a few gas masks and mortar shells, and made for a pretty easy dive. Back on board for dinner and everyone quickly

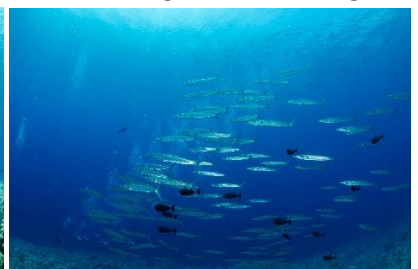
disappeared into their bunks for a good night sleep. We are not moving tonight, but at about 5:30 am we will move an hour away to a new area of diving for tomorrow.

### Day 3

When the boat started up that was the cue for everyone to get up. I think everyone is anxious for the diving to start. We are located in the Ulong Channel area and this is where we will spend the day. The visibility is really good and the water is calm and of course nice



and warm. Lots of wall diving today with just a little current. On the second dive we are going to deploy our reef hooks for the first time. The guides are so funny, they gave us all kinds of time to get ready, telling you to get your hook out and get ready. We cruise into the elbow where everyone hooks up and looks like they know what they're doing. We have sharks and snapper all schooling around making for a



nice show. After we release from the corner we drift over the reef of beautiful hard corals. Bob drops down to the reef as something has caught his eye and up he comes with a Shearwater dive computer!

Now that's a find! Back on the boat it is the usual live aboard schedule; eat, dive, eat, dive, eat, dive.....this is what we came for.



We jump in on the Ulong Channel drift dive and this is Kathy's 300<sup>th</sup> dive. Congratulations Kathy! The drift through the channel was really nice, lots of healthy coral and fish life. Our guide Ogie takes off his fins and I have no idea what he is doing when he puts them together and starts surfing over



the sand. I am cracking up as I have never seen this technique before. We spotted a few Turtles toward the end to finish it off. It's getting late in the day and we still have dive 4 to go. Another snack and back in the water we go. Our average dive time is around 70+ minutes so I'm not sure how we are squeezing in 5 dives a day. As it turns out we are moving the boat over to German Channel area so no late dive today. Thank goodness as I'm not sure I could do another dive today. After another delicious meal, and then everyone makes their way to their bunks to call it a night.

#### Day 4

The interesting part of this live aboard compared to others that we have done is that we don't have any big crossings. Normally, the boat travels at night as you try to sleep with engines running and everything creaking. It is really nice to stay anchored at night so the boat is really quite and I have been sleeping great. The day starts out again at 6 am and we are ready to go. Our first dive was New drop off which was amazing with lots of Sharks feeding, tons of schooling fish, huge Barracuda and a nice size octopus.



There were a couple of Turtles at the beginning of the dive and one smaller size Turtle scratching his back on a rock at the end. Back on the boat for a big breakfast and then off to dive #2 which was a vertical wall at the start of German channel. Here there is a huge ball and chain that apparently the Americans put across the channel to block any of the Japanese coming from Koror. So interesting to see this history that still exist today. Time to eat again and then more diving of course. Third dive today on Turtle Wall Peggy hits her 700<sup>th</sup> dive, way to go Peggy! Group 1 saw all the Turtles while the rest of us



missed them all together. The 4<sup>th</sup> dive today was German Channel to look for Mantas and it did not disappoint. We had 3 swimming together and Bob scored with magic fingers once again. Palau was the first place that I had seen a Manta and it was exciting to see them here again 13 years later. The drift



through German Channel at the end was fun and the hard corals in the channel are beautiful. The crew offers one more dive for the day and everyone taps out except Mary and Allison. The rest of us enjoy another fabulous meal of ribs and tuna sashimi. It's 8:30 pm and most everyone is gone to their cabin for a good night's sleep. We are staying anchored here for another day of diving tomorrow.

## Day 5

Another calm night and beautiful sunrise today. I think we have another 5 dives on the schedule for today starting with Blue Corner. We drift in and we are the only boat here this morning which makes it really nice. This is really the advantage of the live aboard over land based, that you are already out there and can be the first ones on the dive sight. The current is perfect with just enough movement for great Shark action, but not so strong our masks are blowing off. We enjoy 45 minutes of Sharks cruising by,



sometimes they were so close maybe less than 5 feet away. We release our hooks and drift off over the reef where the big resident Napoleon Wrasse hangs out. Back to the boat for a well-deserved breakfast and then our second dive is at Blue Holes which is a large cave with several light holes coming down from the surface making for some pretty dramatic photos. Scott enjoys sitting on his throne at the bottom when all of a sudden we are invaded by divers. They are coming from every direction and the



cave is now full of people. Holy diver soup! We exited stage left and it is just a cluster even on the outside. I think every boat has decided to do this dive at exactly 10:30 am. Dive 3 was a nice reef with lots of Turtles and a nice Crocodile Flathead sitting in a sandy spot. Our last dive of the day is back to German Channel to look for Manta's. Luck was not on our side this time as they were a no show, but we did have plenty of Sharks, schooling fish and a couple of huge Dog Tooth Tuna. Our time underwater is over for the day, no night dive tonight but the moon is out in full and it is huge. Time for dinner and another early night as tomorrows diving is starting ½ hour early at 6:30 am.

## Day 6



Our day's adventure begins with a Shark dive at Blue corner. This time the current is running the opposite direction so we hook in on the other side. The visibility is really good this morning and we have plenty of shark and fish action once again. Just a really nice way to start off our day. After breakfast we pack up the boat to do 2 dives over on Peleliu. It is about a 30 minute run from where we are anchored and our first dive is Peleliu cut. This dive can be quite challenging due to currents and it is extremely important to listen to the guides briefing. The wall is covered in a small yellow soft coral which is beautiful. As we drift to the point the schooling Jacks, Black and Red Snapper and Surgeon Fish are all swimming together. Amazing to watch them swarm over the reef, there are so many it is dizzying to watch. For our surface interval we go to Peleliu where the majority of the



group are doing a land tour to see all the WWII history and the battle of Orange Beach. Our guide is really knowledgeable about the history as he takes us to see all the sights around the island.



From abandoned Japanese Zero planes, to US tanks, and plenty of bunkers to hide in. We stop to see the first cave and large machine gun and there is actually a brush fire right next to it. It is super smoky and hot, but we brave it all to see the gun emplacement. Eyes watering and choking from the smoke we



make that stop a quick one. Our last stop of the day is 1000 man cave where the Japanese had dug out an entire cave system to attack the US soldiers coming across the bay. The cave system was amazing for the fact that people (Koreans) dug it out by hand with shovels. As we ventured inside there were all sorts of cave critters including huge crickets and some big ass spiders! Last but not least it is also filled with bats. We turn off all our lights and then a small group of us turn our lights on and all the bats start to exit the cave. Luckily they are not very big but there are a lot of them. Ok, time to say goodbye to all the creepy crawlies in the cave! We rejoin our group back at the dock and depart for the mothership where we have a very late lunch before we do one more dive for the night. A beautiful sunset tonight as



we head for the night dive. It is a beautiful hard coral garden and the highlight was a huge Cuttlefish.



Back on the boat we quickly shower as the kitchen crew has been busy setting up a BBQ on the beach. The evening is gorgeous with a full moon out and flat calm waters as we weave our way through the islands to a white sandy beach. There is chicken, ribs, beef, mussels, corn and all the great things that make up a great beach BBQ. A few more giant bats flying around tonight and the stars are incredible. Everyone is exhausted so time to call it a night.

## Day 7

Another beautiful sunrise and moon set. We are going to give German channel one more try for Mantas

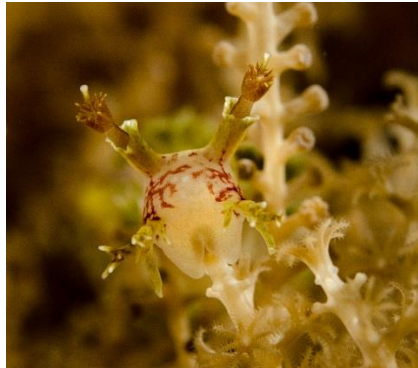


and then it is off to Peleliu for another full day of diving. Low and behold we had 1 small Manta come by. It never went to the cleaning station but circled around a few times, enough to get a few shots. We also saw a Shark at the cleaning station which was really cool as it opened its mouth and went vertical in the water as the cleaner fish darted in and out. There was a giant Stingray that swam off very quickly along the reef as soon as it saw us. Back for breakfast and then off to Peleliu Express for the first dive which is covered with the yellow soft coral. We barely had any current so the soft coral was not blooming.



Normally this dive is screaming current as you drift along, hence the name "express". The reef actually does not have much coral on it and on the top it is just a clean barren shelf. We did have a nice Octopus out and cruising around, changing colors from dark to polka dot. Our second dive was White Beach which is a beautiful hard and soft coral wall which then turned into a coral garden with lots of Turtles and Huge Giant Clams. The 4<sup>th</sup> dive was Turtle Cove and this had to be one of my favorites. It started out with a blue hole and then turned into a colorful soft coral wall as we drifted by in the current. Bob was having computer problems so he ascended to 10 ft for the

entire dive and had a Manta swim right over his head! One more dive to finish off the day at Ngemils Wall. As we headed for the site the moon was not up yet and the stars were so amazing and the phosphorescence in the water was super green. The dive had plenty of macro critters from Nudibranchs,



Crabs, Shrimp, Slipper lobster, Turtle and so much more. Back on the boat the group decided to wait to have dinner for when we returned and we finished it off with a Happy Birthday dessert for Ken. Happy Birthday Ken!

## Day 8

We are visiting Jellyfish Lake first thing this morning to beat the crowds. We depart the boat at 7:00 am and we even beat the rangers there. We have the entire lake to ourselves and the sun is out and the



birds are just waking up. Things have changed a lot since the last time we were here as now there is nice concrete steps and a docking system in place. We snorkel out to the far side and as we go we start to see one or two Jellyfish and then we hit the mother lode. We are swimming in Jellyfish soup. They are



everywhere. It is so cool and there are so many more than what we saw last time. We did try and recreate a picture I took 13 years ago since Penny is with us again on this trip. An hour slips by too quickly as the crew hollers for us to return to the dock. Don't miss this attraction, it really is worth doing. Time for some breakfast and then out for dive 1 which was the Virgin Blue hole. Here we dropped down a chimney to about 90 ft and then you swam out a tunnel to the exit at about 100 ft. The water temp inside dropped about 10 degrees! Brrrrr! We really enjoy our 83 degree water! I think cold water makes me hungry so time to eat again and then we are diving Ngebus Drop Off and Ngebus Coral Gardens. The drop off has nice soft corals and a couple of new nudibranchs that I haven't seen before. As we were traveling to the next dive, we hit a Manta Ray in German Channel. It was a horrible thud and we turned around and saw the Manta swim off and then come back down the channel so hopefully it will be ok.



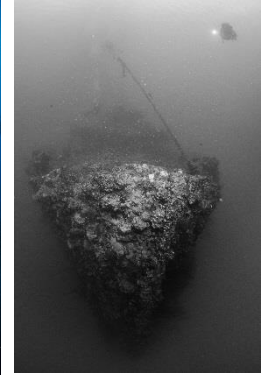
The water is so shallow here and the light was low in the sky making it impossible to see it. The crew says this is the first time this has ever happened. I really hope that is true. The coral gardens is a hard



coral garden and we did have a fly by from an Eagle Ray. By the time we get back to the boat we have about 45 minutes before the night dive. We travel back to Turtle Cove where it is a steep wall with lots of crevices for little critters to hide. We had a huge Pufferfish swimming around which scared the bejesus out of me! Back to the boat for dinner and sleep. The dives don't start until 8:00 am so we get to sleep in. At least that's what we tell ourselves.

## Day 9

The black plague has hit the boat. First it was a simple head cold that Marle and Scott came down with. Then Ken and Phyllis with stomach issues

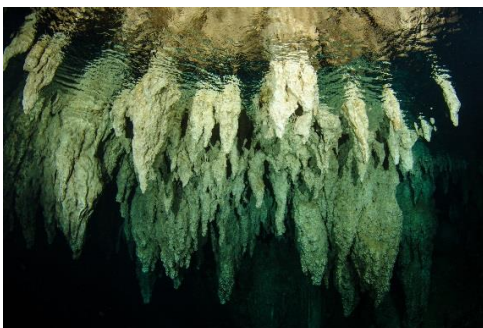


and then last night it claimed Dale, Chris and Liz. So this morning we spent time wiping down every railing, handle, and most important the espresso machine. We are hoping to have it contained at this point and no one else goes down for the count. Our first dive is on the Iro Maru, that is a deep wreck that was sunk by a torpedo in WWII. Here you can see the big hole blown in the bow which took it



down. It is totally encrusted in corals and makes for a very nice dive. Congratulations to Mary who hit her 1100<sup>th</sup> dive this morning on it. Great job Mary! Our 2nd dive is the Jake Seaplane which sits in 40 ft of water and it is still in really good

shape. We also found Allison's Pajama Cardinalfish that she had been hoping to see. Back for lunch and then it is the famous Chandelier Cave. We went in 2 groups and dove in all 4 chambers. I don't remember if we went back that far last time we were here. It is an amazing cave with all the stalactites hanging down and then we pop up into the breathing chambers where it is gorgeous. There are also



Mandarin Fish outside the cave entrance in the coral rubble. I was a little skeptical until our guide found several in the coral, uh, yep they are right there. Our last dive is to Mandarin fish Lake to watch the mating show. It's not really a lake but a very shallow lagoon. They have it roped off now and you have to swim back down the passage way into the lagoon and then you sit in 15 feet of water waiting for them to mate at dusk. They did not disappoint, my rock had great action and most everyone else had good luck. After the dive we surface to a

torrential downpour and the ride back to the boat is very wet and miserable. On board, the crew rinses and hangs up all our dive gear in hopes that it will dry somewhat before we pack in the morning. We finish off our last evening with a delicious meal and most everyone who was sick is already on the mend. Seems to be a 24 hour bug, but has affected each person a little different. I am just praying at this point that I don't get it!

#### Day 10

We awoke to a horrible sound hitting the side of the boat and it turned out the mooring we were on was bumping the side of the boat. Scared the crap out of me since we were in the bow so after that I don't think I slept very well. Everyone is up bright and early this morning, packing up to begin our next



adventure of the trip. The crew makes us a great last breakfast, we put the espresso machine in overdrive as we prepare for departure. We say our goodbye's to the crew and settle our final bills back at the office and then they drop us off at the Palasia with our luggage. At 10:00 am Sams Tours is supposed to pick us up and take us to their shop so we can get all set up for tomorrow. At 10:30 am I have the desk call and they say they are on their way. At 10:45 am they finally show with one guy and one van for 16 people. Well that's not going to work very well. Finally we get the group down to the shop in 2 trips and our dive gear is still sitting at Fish n Fins dive shop. We shuffle through what final paperwork needs to be done and in the meantime all our gear shows up and we get organized for tomorrow. We will be divided up onto 2 boats and we will go out for 2 boat dives a day. Once we are finished some of the group head back to the hotel and the rest of us grab lunch at the bar. Food there is good with typical bar food menu, but the grilled fish sandwich was really good. They give us a lift back to the hotel where we have the entire afternoon off to do laundry, sleep or do nothing at all. The weather is cloudy and cool today so no one is really by the pool. Some of us meet at the bar for happy hour and then figure out where to go to dinner. Ken and Phyllis ate lunch at Jasmine Thai, so we opt to go there for dinner. It is a short walk out the front door and just down on the right. It is a one lady show. She could seat 8 of us and there were 2 others finishing up and that is all she has room for. We sort of overwhelmed her, so much so that she did not answer the phone and she locked the door when another small group tried to come in. Her food was delicious. We had curries, garlic beef, fried rice etc. In the end she ended up bringing us out a plate of Phad Thai as she said it was her specialty and none of us ordered it. Well now we felt bad. It was excellent and if we have the chance to eat there again I would order the Phad Thai. I am so full I think I am waddling back to the hotel. Time for some sleep and excited to see what tomorrows diving is going to bring us.

#### Day 11

At breakfast we get the bad news that now Russ, Peggy and Kathy are out with the sickness that has plagued our group. I think there might only be ½ of us going today. The rest of us are worried that our time is coming and no one will escape this plague. My fingers are crossed. Sam's Tours should be here at 7:45 am for the pick-up, we will see if that really happens after yesterday's performance. Surprise, surprise they were here promptly at 7:45 am. We get to Sam's and get loaded on our boats and my boat heads to Ulong Channel while the other boat heads out to Ngemlis area to New drop off. Both of the boats have great dives the only difference is that in between dives Ulong has a white sand beach to hang out on while you're eating lunch. Where the other boat went there is no beaches so they just tied up to a mooring for their surface interval. We get back to Sam's around 2:30-3:00 pm and several of us opt to



try out the shore dive in front of the bar. This is a place they use for training and there are things for



new students to see, but I don't think I will jump in twice. Bob and I decided to jump back in and do their Mandarinfish dive, which they say they have very large ones, but all we found was one small one that came out for a brief time and then disappeared. Total bust. I think we have been underwater for several hours so I am done. We grab a quick cold beer from the bar and then hitch a ride back to the hotel. Tonight we are going to The Taj which is Indian food for dinner. We would highly recommend this place as the food was very good and they even had a good Mojito! It is a more expensive place to eat but well worth it. Way too full once again as we waddle our way back to the hotel.

#### Day 11

The weather today is much calmer than yesterday and we have flat water for our hour run out to New drop off and Clarence's/Dexter Wall. Our guide Jeremy is really worried about the current but as we jumped in we literally had no current at all. Our first dive marks Marle's 600<sup>th</sup> dive and Chris's 100<sup>th</sup> dive,



congratulations to both Marle and Chris! Bob's boat went to Ulong and dove the dives that we had done yesterday. Both boats had great dives once again. We did have a huge rain squall come through, but luckily we were underwater but Bob was not as lucky since they were in it longer. Our ride back was



beautiful as we weaved our way through the rock islands. We stopped to take a photo of a beautiful rock island that has just eroded away into an amazing arch. Back at Sam's we grab a cold beer and relax while a few people do the shore dive and the rest head back to the hotel. Our BBQ dinner was cancelled for tonight and pushed back to tomorrow since we still have several sick folks. We all meet up for happy hour and then everyone heads off for dinner. We went back to the bakery for Filipino food and another group went to try a seafood place. Our place serves huge portions and everyone had way too much food so we had to waddle home after dinner again. Good thing we are doing all this diving otherwise I think I would have gained 10 lbs by now. We should have our group back to full boats tomorrow as everyone is up and feeling much better.

## Day 12

Another day out on the water and it begins with sunny skies and a little bumpy water. Both boats make their way out to the Ngemlis area which is about a 45 minute boat ride. Our boat jumps in on Blue holes



area only we do the wall instead of the Blue Holes. Bob's boat jumps in on New drop off once again and the current was a RAC (rippin' ass current). Everyone is hooked in and Dale had a little issue with his tank falling out and then his regulator mouthpiece getting tore out also. Earl spots him and quickly leaps to the rescue to help him put it all back together before anyone else could get unhooked! Bravo Earl!



The skies are dark and rain is coming our way as we take a quick break on the beach. Second dives were Barnum Wall for us and Jimmies Reef (exploratory dive) for Bob's boat. Ours was beautiful soft coral with a huge Stingray that came up from the deep, then changing into a beautiful coral garden. Bob's dive had a beautiful coral garden and unique reef structure. The ride back was a bit wet with pelting rain and the boats going Mach 5. Don your squall gear and hang on for the ride! If I didn't say it earlier make sure that you bring squall gear as you never know when it will rain. Back at the dock some of the group is doing a quick dive at Chandelier Cave since they

missed it earlier. The rest of us head back to the hotel and decide to make our way to Tebang to look at story boards before they close. We make it in enough time, but you can tell the group has already been here and bought out the inventory. There are several men carving new boards to try and replace what everyone has bought in the last few days. The carvings here are much more superior to the jail, so we opt for a small Manta carving. Really beautiful work and I think we will check back in a few days to see if they have anything new on the wall. Sam's tours is picking up the group tonight at 6:00 pm as we are finally going to have our BBQ dinner night. There is a huge variety of food that they have prepared and it is really good. After a few drinks with our guides, we call it a night and get ready for our last day of diving. We say good-bye to Chris as he makes his way back home, departing at the wee hours of the morning.



## Day 13

Our morning begins with a torrential downpour as we are eating breakfast, followed by a double rainbow. Kathy predicts that we will see Dolphins today. Sounds good to me. Everyone heads out for diving today except we leave behind Scott and Penny as they are packing to fly home in the wee hours



of the morning. Our boat heads out to Ulong and wouldn't you know it, there are Dolphins jumping all around. Thanks Kathy! We try and jump in to snorkel with them but they will just have none of that. So



we give up and just run the boat around in circles so they can bow ride. This is a great way to start off our day of diving. We are diving Ulong Cliff, which has beautiful hard corals, Bumphead Parrotfish, Napoleon Wrasse and out on the point we have a huge school of Jacks, Barracuda and lots of sharks circling



around. An absolutely amazing dive. Bob's boat dove Barnums Wall that we did yesterday and they had Turtles and more turtles. So many Turtles that Liz was run over by one. Our surface interval we spent running over to German Channel so we could dive the shallow coral gardens. Upon

entering we see several giant Marble Rays and right after those was a nice small Manta cruising the shallows. Wow, we aren't even close to the Manta cleaning stations. After a while we turn around and find a nice Crocodile Flathead and then another Manta circles almost hitting me in the head. It stops at a cleaning station where we sit and enjoy the show. The other group dives Fairyland where they had large schools of Jacks and Snapper. They head back after their dives and we stop at a little beach to enjoy our last lunch on our last dive day. Back at Sam's we clean gear and get it hung up to dry and of course enjoy a few cold ones before going and showering to only come back and have another BBQ dinner. The



food was really good once again and it was more of the local fare and plenty of it. Tonight we say good-bye to Penny and Scott as they catch the 3:00 am flight home.

#### Day 14

Today is a free day and everyone is heading in different directions today. We see a few of the group at breakfast while others are just taking a day of leisure. Our island tour begins at 9:00 am and we are joined by Marle and Russ. Our driver Jacob will be driving us around today and our tour starts with a stop at the Capital Building. It is big just like one in the states which is quite surprising and Jacob tells us



it is only about 10 years old. It has a spectacular view and sits atop a ridge line. The Vice President of the Senate, Kathy Kesolei died a couple of weeks ago and today they are holding a memorial service at the Capital for her. It has police and secret service people all over the place which makes taking pictures a little tricky. We tried going down to the beach, but her house was along the way and there were people lining the street and tents set up like a parade so we turned around and high tailed it out of there before

we got stuck. Second stop is the Ngardmau Waterfall and here you will also find an eco-amusement park which included zip lining and some little train ride. Both of these looked like they had seen better days and busier times gone by. We opted to just hike down to the waterfall which was beautiful. The water level is a little low so it is not quite roaring over the rock, but when standing underneath the fall it

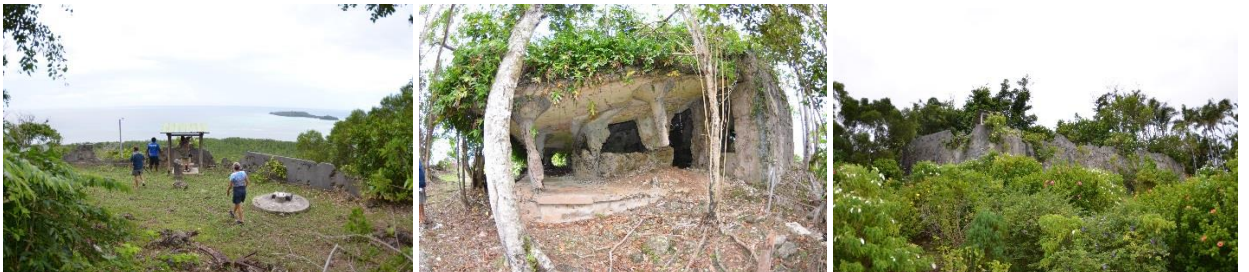




is quite painful says Bob. Who was the only brave or crazy one to stand underneath it! The hike back was a long, uphill trek, probably a good 30 minutes each way. At the top we have our lunch before moving on to the stone monoliths called “The stone faces of Badrulchau” There are 37 stones made of basalt, some weighing over 5 tons. The origins of the stones are still unknown and several of them have



carved scary faces. A pretty amazing place that makes no sense because the stones don't line up east to west or north to south. Same with the faces as they are all facing a different direction, almost like they are looking at each other. After that, Bob was curious about a Japanese lighthouse located at the most northern point of the island. Our guide didn't know about it but one of the older men at the stone faces did and told us where to go. Jacob was up for it so away we went and the view from there is 180 degrees and if they trees were cut down you could have had a 360 degree view. What is left of the



building shows plenty of bullet holes where they shot the shit out of it during the war. Our last stop is in the state of Aimeliik and there is a building called a Bai, which is a traditional men's meeting house. Here the men gather from different states to discuss issues or disputes between the states. Afterward the



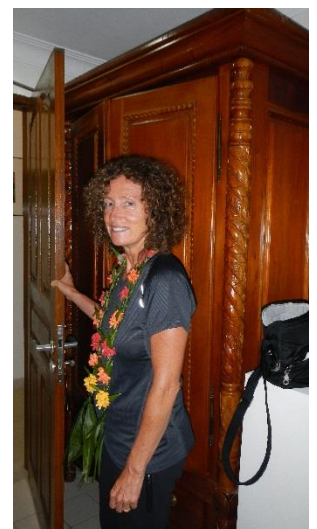


men are “entertained” by a few select woman from that state. There are only 4 Bai’s still standing in Palau and there are 16 “states” that make up Palau. Our tour brought us back to the hotel at 5:00 pm, not sure what took so long but then again it is a long drive to the North end. We are all getting together for dinner tonight at Elilai restaurant, this is a place Mike

heard great things about so we are excited to try it out and it did not disappoint. It is located up on a hillside with a beautiful view and everyone’s dinner was delicious. The special was a Snapper Carpaccio in parchment and a Tuna Tartar appetizer...simply melt in your mouth good. This restaurant is on the more expensive side but certainly worth it. This was our last night in Palau before we fly out tomorrow night for Yap, so it was the perfect way to end the trip. They have free shuttle service, so we hopped in the van and back to the hotel we went.

## Day 15

Our morning starts out pretty leisurely with a slow breakfast and then we have some errands to run to tidy up some last minute business. A few of the group are doing the land tour today, unfortunately it has been raining all morning so there might be a bit more water in the waterfall for them. At least the hike up and back will not be sweltering hot. Five of us caught a cab to run some errands to finish up some business today. It basically was \$5 per person for 1 hour of driving us wherever we needed to go. It took us exactly an hour and then we were back at the hotel getting the rest of our stuff packed up for our departure tonight. Bob and I out to have lunch and stopped at several places, but none of the menu’s looked good and I had my mind set on fresh spring rolls after seeing them on the menu last night. So after messing around for ½ an hour we just decided to catch a ride and head up to Elilai restaurant and eat what we wanted. We enjoyed the great view, a nice glass of wine and some fresh spring rolls with a wonderful gorgonzola papaya salad. They were still running the shuttle service so we caught a ride back to the hotel just in time to catch our 90 minute massage. We have a late checkout today so we shower and finish up packing and make it down to the lobby with all our luggage at 6:00 pm. The group is down at the bar for happy hour and report back that everyone had a great time doing all the different things they were doing. We have a couple of drinks and then we try Mog Mog for dinner. They are fast and efficient and most people have tempura or the mixed grill, it is ok, but certainly not the best place we went. Back to the Palasia Hotel to hang out until 9:30 pm and then we load the luggage truck and 2 vans take us to the airport. The ride is about 25 minutes to the airport and when we arrive I think we are the first ones to check in. United Airlines is the flight that we are taking to Yap which continues onto Guam departing at 12:25 am. It is a full flight and I have no idea why all the flights in Micronesia depart and arrive in the middle of the night. When departing from Palau we had to pay a \$20 departure tax and a \$30 green fee, CASH. I thought it was only the \$20 because it was a domestic flight but I was wrong and I’m pretty sure we will be paying this \$50 again when we come back into Palau for our flight home. The flight to Yap takes 45 minutes and when we landed we hit hard and the pilot slammed on the breaks. Maybe this is why they fly at night so you can’t see how close the pilot comes to running the plane off the tarmac! Immigration is fast and easy, pick up luggage, hand over customs paperwork and the resort staff for the Manta Ray Bay Resort is standing there ready for us. They quickly mark your room number on the bags and then load onto the bus and we’re out of here. The resort is only a 10 minute ride away and once we arrive they give you a





quick 10 minute tour and then go to your room and your luggage will be there in about 5 minutes. It is now about 3:00 am as you do jump ahead 1 hour. By the time we figure out all the things in the room it is almost 4:00 am before passing out.

## Day 16

Breakfast ends at 10:00 am so we are up at about 9:00 am to eat and figure out all the details of dive gear, camera's etc. John is the man in charge of the diving operation so he gives us the tour and so we get everyone moving in the right direction. We will be split on 2 boats for the first couple of days and then we will be put on one boat. The offer us 2 dives today if we want and everyone is up for it, although a bit tired, we are excited to see what Yap has to offer us. John tells us to set up for macro which is a change as everything we have been shooting has been mostly wide angle. Our first dive site is Slow and Easy which has a Scorpion Leafish, lots of nudis, gobies and all the macro we have been



craving. The second dive we cross through a narrow mangrove channel out to the other side and dive Mi'l Channel which is known for Manta's even though we have macro on. Of course shortly into the dive we have 2 Manta's come down the channel, they are not very big and seem to be quite shy and swing wide from the group. A short time later one of them does a quick drive by as it makes its way back up the channel. Back at the resort the dive staff takes care of all your gear you just take your wetsuit and camera. We just love that kind of service! We quickly shower and make our way over to the Mnuw,



which is a large vessel anchored out in front of the resort. Here is where all your meals are served and of course the bar is located on the top deck. There is a quick manager's welcome meeting to fill us in on all the details of how things work around the resort. We will be doing 3 dives a day so we need to order lunch the night before because when we leave in the morning we will be gone all day. The food menu consists of plenty of what I would call American

choices, but there is still a fresh catch of the day which was wahoo and tuna. Both were excellent for dinner. We are exhausted so a quick change of ports on the camera so we are ready for tomorrow's departure at 7:30 am.

## Day 17

We are up early and excited to see what Yap diving is all about. Our first dive is Stammtsich which is a Manta dive in 15 ft of water. It did not disappoint. We had 3 Manta's total coming in to a cleaning station right in front of us. It was mesmerizing as we hung out for almost 2 hours! Fun stuff. Our second dive was Vertigo and it is known for Sharks. We jumped in and had





about 20 grey reefs and maybe 6-7 Blacktips. They come really close as apparently they hold a shark feeding at this location even though we were not feeding the sharks. Our 3<sup>rd</sup> dive was a drift on a coral



wall and garden, just nice and easy over all the hard corals. There are really no soft corals here. We decided to do the Mandarin fish dive tonight to see how it is. Dive time is pretty much however long you want to stay down. Our average dive times are 70, 80, 90 minutes. We did have to circumnavigate the island today as the shortcut is impossible to come through at low tide. It is really a long way around the tip of this island and the wind was blowing pretty steady so it made for a rough ride back. Just relaxing now waiting for our 5:30 pm departure. The Mandarins were not as active as they were in Palau. My pair did come up and mate but unfortunately I hadn't taken a picture in so long my strobes went to sleep and I missed most of the action by the time I figured it out and turned them back on. Back on the boat, Peggy had the same problem. Oh well, sometimes it's good and other times it just doesn't work out. We are starving so a quick dinner and then off to bed for another full day of diving tomorrow.



#### Day 18

They have moved us to the big boat so we are all together today. A few big rain squalls have already come through this morning so it could be a wet day. We are doing 3 dives at the southern tip today, the



boat is slower so we will stay in the same area. Our first dive is Yap caverns which is a series of swim throughs between large boulders and cracks in the wall. Makes for an interesting dive due to the structure, but not much in the caves other than a few glassy sweepers. Our other 2 dives were on coral gardens and walls, with some of the most beautiful hard corals. Since our departure was at 8:30 am this morning, we do not make it back to the dock until 5:30 pm. Too late for a night dive so they scheduled ours for tomorrow night. Starving once again so up for dinner and we made the mistake of ordering pizza and apparently ours and Mary's were made wrong so they had to make new ones. I think it was 90 minutes before our food came and I'm ready to pass out. I think we will stick to the fish for tomorrow.

#### Day 19

Another great morning sunrise and it looks like we had a few rain showers last night. We are back on the big boat again today and we will do similar diving that we did yesterday. I shot macro yesterday, so today I changed to wide angle. Found out at breakfast that it is all macro today as we have to stay closer to the resort as people want to do a night dive. Back to macro it is. Thank goodness because as soon as we were out of the channel there were big rollers because the wind has really picked up. The first dive is



just outside the channel and getting off the boat is pretty challenging. It turns out to be a macro dive and we really didn't see that much. Luckily everyone made it back on the boat safely without getting killed on the ladder. We tuck back inside where it is calm and we decide to do our other 2 dives here as it just isn't safe for us to be out in the big waves. This is macro muck diving for sure, not the greatest but at least there are plenty of nudis and gobies for us to shoot. Since it is so windy, we decide against doing the night dive as it would be right back to the same sight we just did. We might make happy hour today for the first time. We are back to the smaller boats tomorrow so we can make it to the other side



where it will be calmer and better diving. We ring the bell for a few drinks down at the camera room. The staff is on it and quickly takes our order for some fancy smancy umbrella drinks. We even make it to dinner at a decent hour and enjoyed a second umbrella drink before happy hour ended. Off to bed as tomorrow will be an early departure.



## Day 20

Back on the small boats today as we are full throttle cutting through the mangroves to the Manta site. We are doing it first thing this morning and hoping for some great action. When we swim down to the cleaning station we do not see any Manta's. I'm thinking this is really not a good sign. I think we were there almost 20 minutes before the first Manta sighting. Thank goodness! There are 2 together that



come in to get cleaned, the visibility is lower today probably due to the wind we had yesterday. They stay briefly and then swim off. Our sightings were few and far in between today, not sure why, but at least we did get to see them again. They were also different Mantas than what we saw 2 days ago. You can identify the Mantas by the markings on their bellies. We try Vertigo again with the sharks, only this time they put a bait tube down in the coral to keep the sharks interested so they don't swim away. It was good action as they just kept going around and around in a circle. I'm pretty sure everyone got a good Shark shot today. For the last dive, one boat decided to go down and dive Yap Caverns since they didn't get to see it when we were there before. Our group dove Yap Corner which was a drift into the channel. Unfortunately, the tide really didn't switch long enough and the channel was still pretty murky





when we got there. We did drop 3 Crown of Thorn Starfish over the deep so they couldn't eat all the coral up top. There was also a nice school of small Barracuda in the shallows. The tide is really low as we come back through the mangrove so we have to go super slow and at one part we were not even



moving as the tide was so strong. Back again around 4:00 pm, we decide to take a walk outside the resort. There are several little grocery stores close by and a couple of little restaurants as well. We pick up a couple of local made baskets, these are used for carrying around all your betel nut paraphernalia. You have your betel nut, lime, tobacco and peppermint leaf. This is constant all day long and everyone here chews, as Bob likes to

say "They are big into the nut here". Our last 2 dives are tomorrow and then we are going to try and make a land tour in the afternoon when we return from the dives. A few folks went out on the night dive tonight, so we will see how it went when we see them in the morning.

## Day 21

Our last day of diving today and after a very early breakfast at 6:00 we have left the dock by 7:15 am. Our first dive is Manta ridge which actually was the old cleaning station before they moved over to the Stammtisch dive site. This site is a narrow channel and in one portion there is beautiful purple soft corals



at the base. This is the only dive site where we have seen any soft corals. It has great schooling fish life and a few large Bumphead Parrot fish which came swimming by. After that we decide to give the Manta dive one

last try and unfortunately after 90 minutes we have been completely skunked. Have you ever sat on a dive waiting for Manta's to show? Well there is all kinds of shenanigans going on. Some were sleeping, others doing selfies and anything else to keep them from getting completely bored! Oh well, we did get the opportunity to see them 2 other times. Back at the resort we have a quick lunch and a cold beer by



the pool and then we are off and running on a land tour around Palau. Lee & Richard are our guides today as they drive us around the beautiful lush and very clean island of Yap. Our first stop is to see a





Hellcat Airplane that was shot down over Yap during WWII, then a local village meeting house, the men's house (Apia), we walked the 1000 year old stone path, another men's house, one of the largest

stone money banks in Yap and the last stop was the old airport landing strip built by the Japanese where 2 Japanese Zero aircraft were shot down and one anti-aircraft gun. It was nice to see the entire island and how clean and well-kept it is. Back at the resort it is time for cold drinks and a little dinner on the deck.

Day 22

Packing day. Pretty much a day of leisure with a late breakfast and the packing up of all the stuff that has exploded from our suitcases. Pool time with some sunshine before lunch up on the deck of the



Mnew. We have a bit more time by the pool before we need to get ready for our cultural tour departing at 4:30 pm tonight to one of the local villages performing the traditional

Yap Bamboo Stick dance. There are about 30 of us from the resort and the van drops us off at the start of the stone path that leads us to the village meeting house. The path is very curved and uneven which we are told is to prevent others from looking into your home, because they need to watch their step. This is really true as we all carefully walked along looking down to watch our steps. We have 2 guides leading us to the village, they are dressed in traditional attire and as custom is in Yap, the women are topless. Some of the women have a unique coloring on their skin which we later discover is coconut oil



with turmeric that they rub on themselves. After arriving at the meeting house we meet Stan who I



believe is the chief, and gives us a warm welcome and each of us is greeted with a head lei made of beautiful and fragrant flowers. As we wait for all the dancers to arrive, Stan explains to us the traditional ways of the Yapeese. The young girls are making the flower headdresses which take about 20 minutes for



each one. A couple more women are weaving baskets that they use to gather fruits, vegetables or even betel nut. Another man is weaving coconut husk fibers which he winds together to make some very strong rope or string. Stan husks coconuts to show us the different stages in which they eat them, the last stage he equates to "cotton candy" which is very spongy inside. He cuts up the first one that we all try and it isn't bad and the second one he tastes he spits out with a bad look on his face and says it is bad or sour. Stan tells a young boy to climb up a betel nut tree to show how they harvest it and then he



demonstrates how to prepare it and chew it. A couple of tourists from the group decide to try it and both of them have sour looks as they chew away on it. You do need to be careful of the lime they put on as it can burn the inside of your gums and mouth. No thanks, I'll pass on this tradition. Finally, all the dancers have arrived and everyone has put on their decorations and the traditional Bamboo stick dance begins. There are 2 young boys in the group and apparently it is a mix of men and women who do the dance. They don't lightly tap the sticks, they are really smacking them together. Meanwhile, there is chanting and singing during each portion during the 20 minute performance. Very impressive.



Afterward, we thank everyone for letting us come and enjoy their way of life. It is amazing to see that some of the culture still remains intact as I'm sure in the future this will all be lost. A short ride back to the resort, we quickly eat dinner and do a final pack before our departure at 8:30 pm for the airport. We leave behind Allison, Mike, Liz, Phyllis and Ken who are catching the 3:00 am departure to Guam instead of Palau. The Yap airport is pretty basic, two people going through your bags by hand since they do not have any x-ray machines. Beyond that a United Airlines agent hands us our tickets and luggage claim



checks and then over to pay your \$20 departure tax, in US cash only. Finally, they open up security to the gate area and you have an immigration person you see first before going into security. Again, hand checking your carry-on and I'm not sure if the metal detector was even on. Inside the waiting area it is air conditioned with bathroom facilities. The flight from Guam arrives early, so shortly after the passengers depart they load the flight with the rest of us to Palau. The flight departs about 15 minutes early, I'm guessing everyone was on the plane. The flight itself is only about 45 minutes long. We land in Palau and move our clocks back an hour and as we exit the airport the Rose Garden Resort bus is waiting for us. It was about a 20 minute ride to the hotel which is located on the side of a steep hill and as we drive up the entrance we look up to a lot of stairs leading to each room. After we check in luckily there are 4 very young strong men willing to haul all our heavy bags up a whole lot of stairs to our rooms. We are on the top tier of course and I feel bad that they have to do all this again tomorrow to bring them back down. It's midnight now so time for bed and we will see what tomorrow has in store for us.

### Day 23

We wake up to rain hitting the rooftop as a squall rolls through this morning. The view from our deck is stunning as we have a 180 degree view of the water. We enjoy a cup of coffee on the patio, which we



luckily had packed in our bag as they had cups and the hot water pot but no tea or coffee in the room. We go for breakfast which is at the bottom of the hill and find that the group is already down there figuring out what to do for the day. Breakfast is included and you have many choices and when it is served there is plenty to fill you up. Dale, Peggy and Kathy make plans for a massage, which doesn't happen at the resort, a van comes to pick you up and take you somewhere else. The cost is \$30 cash for an hour, so we will wait for the report back before trying one ourselves. We decided to take a taxi to the jail to do a last minute check for story boards since Tebang Story board shop is closed on Sunday. It cost \$6 for a ride into town and they drop us off right in front. The jail "story board" shop is now huge with the most boards we have seen. I don't think they are all carved by the inmates, it seemed to me that different carvers had them there on consignment. It took us a while as the selection was huge but I also noticed that the price was much higher than the other place. Russ found one and decided to negotiate which he ended up with a \$125 discount, which I thought was super good. We decided to try and negotiate with a couple but she just would not come down low enough to make it worth it. We flag a taxi back to the hotel for \$6 to relax and do some reading. The report back from the massage place was that it was good, more like a Chinese massage, very strong. Bob and I decide to opt out since it was at a parlor and smelled like cigarettes. At 3 pm I was getting hungry so I walked down to the restaurant to have a light lunch as we were going to go next door to Elilah for dinner. I ordered a plate of YakiSoba and ate part of it while Kathy, Marle, Peggy, Dale and I all chatted away the afternoon watching football. We have to check out by 7 pm, so we shower, do a final pack and call the strong boys to carry all our luggage down all the flights of stairs. The restaurant was just around the corner so we decide to walk over, it was a little dark and probably not the smartest thing to do on a busy roadway. We spend 2 ½ hours enjoying another wonderful dinner before they give us a ride back to the hotel. We haven't really had any down time so we break out the Skipbo cards and proceed to waste away the remaining 3 hours



playing cards. It is now midnight and time to load the bus with all our luggage. It is a quick 20 minute drive to the airport before we unload and drag all the luggage to the counter. Easy check-in with Korean, they had our boarding passes and checked our bags all the way through to Vancouver and didn't even charge us for extra bags. Korean had a bag limit of 1, but Air Canada has a limit of 2, so they had honored the Air Canada limit. After check-in you have to get in line to pay the departure tax. We decide to ask about being in transit since we had already paid the \$50 last week and we were only staying in Palau overnight before flying out. Mary was the first to go through so she asked and all we had to do was to present our boarding pass from our flight last night and then we didn't have to pay it again. Wow this is great. Easier said than done though since I had put the boarding passes together in a safe place but now I could only find Bob's. We were the last 2 of our group to come to the counter and the guy decides to hassle me bad about not having it, but decides at the end to let me go through. I was grateful since it saved us \$100 bucks! Now we will just sit and wait until 3 am for the flight to depart. Let the longest day of your life begin now. Our flight to Seoul was uneventful and then we had an 8 hour layover in Korea. There is a transit hotel located in the airport that we had booked a room in before we left from the states. This was the best decision as we went horizontal for 6 hours, woke up, showered and found our way to the next flight. Not as easy as Singapore Airport, but a good option. Just be careful not to leave that wing of the airport because if you miss it you cannot get back in. Our flight home was long but smooth and the crossing at the border was easy as well. This was a great trip with a great group of people and we had a fantastic time.

This trip was not without a few bumps along the way. Before we even left for this trip our original airline tickets on China Airlines were cancelled due to a change in their flight schedule. We had to scramble to find an alternative which we did with a combination of Air Canada and Korean Airlines flying out of Vancouver BC. The other option is United Airlines but for me that was just too many stops, I think there were 5 different flights involved. Then 2 months before we were to leave we received notice that our live aboard boat had ended up on a reef and the boat would not be back up and running for our trip. After a lot of scrambling and with the help of 2 wholesalers that I have worked with for years we were able to find the Ocean Hunter III live aboard. I have to give a lot of credit to them for moving people around in order to finally accommodate my entire group so we could all be together. We had to change our flights since now we needed to depart earlier than planned and come up with something to do for 6 days between Palau and our departure to Yap. We used Sam's Tours 13 years ago so we made the decision to use them again. We found hotels that still had room for all of us which was crazy with such short notice. I am still amazed that we were able to pull this trip back together and it actually went super smooth and was an amazing trip. I have to give a lot of credit to my group of travelers who trusted us and were very flexible with all the changes. It really could have been a nightmare. In over 20 years of doing travel I have never had anything like this happen and I really hope it is another 20 before anything like it happens again!



Bob and I would like to thank everyone for joining us on this Micronesian adventure. We had an incredible time and hope you all did as well. Having been in Palau 13 years ago, it was exciting and also a little sad to see how it has changed. It was great to see Yap for the first time and we hope to return again someday soon.

Cheers, Kelley & Bob