

# TOBAGO ISLAND

March 8-16, 2014

## Anacortes Diving Adventure Team



Linda, Kelley, Ken, Maria, Kathy, Karma, Dale, Peggy

# Tobago

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Route: Seattle—JFK—Tobago. Traveling on Delta & Caribbean Airlines.

### Departure

It is raining buckets out as we make our way to Seattle for our usual red-eye flight out to JFK. Delta was able to check our bags all the way through to Tobago and we got the Caribbean Airline Baggage allowance which was 2 free 50lb bags.

We have a 7 hour layover in JFK so we decide to pay the \$50 for the Delta Sky Lounge and we are able to use it in Seattle before we leave. The flight left on time and was pretty uneventful, the flight was pretty much full.

### Travel Day 1

Upon arrival at JFK we make our way over to Terminal 4 to find a Caribbean Airline agent so we can get some boarding passes. We find the one counter and they inform us that we have to go all the way outside to check with the Caribbean Airlines Service Counter. Even if you have a boarding pass! If you read the fine print it tells you that if you haven't checked in with them an hour before your flight you lose your seat. The desk does not open until 10:00am so we go to the Delta Lounge to hang out until we have to make a run. This is a brand new lounge which is huge with great chairs to work or sleep. They have very large shower rooms that we plan on using before jumping on our next flight. Ok, group 1 heads out to the front counters while the rest of us watch all the carry-ons, so that coming back through security is a breeze. It was a great idea until the Service counter wanted to see the carry-ons! Dale did some fast talking and they were finally able to get their boarding passes. Team 2 heads out and this time we take our carry-ons minus all the liquids and laptops etc. They proceed to weigh mine and tell me it's too heavy so I tell them it's all camera equipment and they seem to be ok with that. Security is light so this whole ordeal takes less than 40 minutes. What a hassle. Time for lunch, and the lounge just has snacks or pay to order food, which the reports were that it wasn't that bad. A few of us headed out into the terminal for lunch at the Palms and it was good, and certainly plenty more than we could eat. Here's the best part of the Delta Lounge...a shower. There are six shower rooms and they are very good size with shower, toilet and changing area. They do supply you with all amenities, shampoo, conditioner, soap, towels, hair dryers etc. This is worth the \$50 alone after traveling all night and now with a 8 hour layover (our flight has been delayed an hour) you could not ask for anything better. Time for a last glass of free wine before we have to make the long walk to our gate to finally catch our flight to Tobago. After getting airborne our flight was about 4 ½ hours and pretty uneventful. The interesting part was that when we boarded the plane it said Air Jamaica on the side. If memory serves me correctly, they went out of business years ago and the last time I flew on their plane we had to declare an emergency landing. It did not give me a warm and fuzzy feeling for the flight, and some of their planes were not even allowed to fly into the US. Now I know who bought their planes....Caribbean Airlines. We arrived in Tobago alive and in one piece! Customs and immigration was a breeze and our luggage was already out and waiting for us. The airport is quite small so our driver Heston was waiting to drive us to Blue Waters Inn. All our luggage and people did not fit in the one van so he had to have a friend of his take a bunch of our luggage. It is a good one hour drive from the airport to Speyside town, up and down steep hills and very windy roads. If it was daylight out, I think it would be an incredibly scenic drive. Once we arrive at the resort it is late, about 10:45pm and all our keys and paperwork are sitting outside on a table. Jason comes out to greet us and they have food ready for us that we had pre-ordered before we left. Amazing that the chef is still here, and has everything ready and warm. We enjoy our nice meal and great rum punch to the sound of the surf hitting the beach 50 feet away. Afterwards we grab our luggage and find our room, the only person left to help us is the

security guard. A quick unpack, get our Wi-Fi up and running so I can check in with Bob to let him know that we arrived safely and it's time for lights out. Can't wait for tomorrow.

## Day 2

Woke up to the alarm at 7:00am and started unpacking all our dive gear and getting things organized. Due to the late arrival of our flight, the dive shop let us sleep in and gave us plenty of time to get organized. Breakfast is at 8:00am so I had time to even set up my camera. Our group has all meals included and really where we are located this would be the best plan if you're diving. The resort is full, but not with divers, mostly birders and vacationers/honeymooners. Tobago is well known to be one of the best destinations for bird watching and also one of the most romantic islands for a honeymoon vacation. It is still a relatively unknown destination for divers, but I have a feeling the diving is going to be very different and very good. As we go to breakfast outside our



room are some very large birds on the walk which we later find out are called Chachalakas. Come to find out they are pretty much equal to a rooster in the morning. We meet at the dive store at 9:30am for our briefing, analyzing Nitrox, paperwork and all the info necessary for us to have a great day. We meet back up at 11:30am for the dive briefing



and then jump on the boat for the first dive. The first dive is always exciting as everyone works out their weighting and equipment issues. There is a slight current, seems to be running across the reef instead of us drifting with it, so we actually have to work a little bit. The sponges here are plentiful and colorful along with barrel sponges coming in every size and shape. The guide Joel finds a nice orange Seahorse and several people spot a Nurse Shark out over the sand. The soft corals are plentiful and lots of fish to see as well. Once we are back on board we go back



to the dock for lunch and a second dive at 2:00pm. Since we drifted so slowly on the first dive, we decided to dive the second half of the first dive since we didn't see the gigantic Brain Coral. Which to be honest, was one of the biggest Brain Coral that I have ever seen. The current is picking up and is a bit stronger than the first dive, but you just go with the flow and do your safety stop out in the blue water. Back at the dock it is time for a cold beer and a few last minute rays before the sun heads over the top of the ridge. We are on the East side of the island so we get the morning sun, but no sunset. Dinner starts at 6:30pm and is also order off the menu with nice jumbo Shrimp, Fish or Lamb and of course dessert. Now that our bellies are nice and full, it seems like a great time to go horizontal. Pretty casual and laid back as breakfast starts at 7:30am and we are to be on the dive boat at 9:00am. It was a great first day and we look forward to tomorrow.

## Day 3

Beautiful sunny day as we head out to do the dive called "Picker". Not sure why it's called that but apparently we are going to go through some "cut" as we drift along the wall. Everything is going good with lots of barrel sponges (shaped more like taco's) and plenty of other colorful sponges. The current is picking up as we near the





corner and we keep ourselves between the island and a very large rock, this apparently is the cut. It has nice



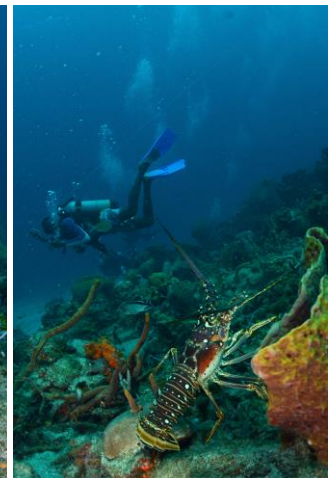
corals and sponges but the current is all over the place. We spot a big Turtle sleeping on the bottom as well as a huge Tarpon that came swimming through at the very end. Back at the dock we have about an hour to kill and then we are off to the second dive. We are doing Angelfish Reef, and it is nice and easy with no current to worry about. Back at the dock we decide that after lunch we are going to go Kayaking around in the bay. The sun is behind clouds which is nice for our paddle around in the bay. The dive shop doesn't want you to kayak beyond the bay due to the currents that can be quite strong out on the points. Once we are back at the beach, Peggy & Karma jump in for snorkel while the rest of us enjoy the lounge chair on the dock. This is the last place the sun hits before it goes over the hill for the night. It is pretty windy so

once the sun goes down we hit the Jacuzzi tub by the pool to warm up and enjoy some pretty good rum punches. Time for dinner and then back to the room to call it a night. Tomorrow we are doing 3 dives, this will certainly keep us out of the bar in the afternoons!



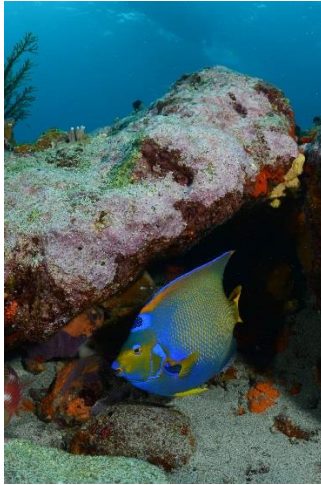
#### Day 4

We meet for breakfast, which is the same menu every day, so you pretty much know what you want. This morning's dive was Black Jack Hole which was a nice slow drift along an incredible colorful reef. The different kinds of colorful sponges all mixed together give the reef a completely different look. It's like a watercolor painting, pretty unique and unlike anything I have ever seen before in the Caribbean. We did find our first



Nudibranch which looked like a lettuce leaf, and there were a couple of Seahorses at the very end of the dive. The second dive was Cathedral and this started out as a drift and then there was just no current, so it was super easy poking along. We found a Giant Green Moray and 2 small reef Squid and the Orange Sponge here is so plentiful. If you are opting for a third dive, you need to order lunch at breakfast so it is ready when you arrive. Otherwise the afternoon boat will leave without you. The 3<sup>rd</sup> dive this afternoon was Back Garden. Here there





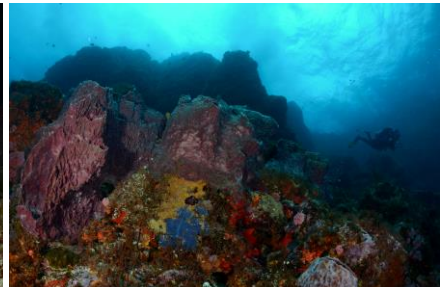
were small patches of reef with lots of life and we just kept moving from patch to patch. We had a nice Lobster out running on the sand trying to make his way to the next patch of reef. The other abundant fish here are Queen Angelfish. They are everywhere on this dive. We do have a bit of current on this dive so we have to work a bit harder to get where we want to go. Towards the end of the dive the current is really cooking and Joel shows us that we need to go through this cut in the rocks, so we tuck everything in and get shot out the other side. Here the current is really swirly as we drift out into the blue to do our safety stop. As I look

below me there is a huge Tarpon, it has to be at least 5 ft long and very wide. That ends our diving for the day so back to the dock and then the hot tub. Time for showers,



## Day 5

Maria had checked the weather yesterday and told us today would be the nicest day with clear skies. Funny, we woke up to clouds and breezy conditions. Wasn't looking too bad but as we get ready to head to the dive shop the wind starts howling and down comes a rain squall. Ok, best not to check the weather and just be surprised when you wake up in the morning! Today we did some incredible dives. Our first dive was Favorite, which had 2 really nice Seahorses, one brown/yellow and the other was orange. Add in a couple of Giant Green Morays and lots of fish life and it makes for a really nice dive. Second dive was Bookends, which is a pretty advanced dive due to the swell against the rocks. The reason you want to do this dive is for the Giant school of Tarpon. You jump in and cruise down the reef until you come right behind one of the pinnacles and there is this bowl that the Tarpon hang out in. We were a little apprehensive as we needed to be careful not to get swept up to the



surface with the surge. Once we were inside the bowl it was calm as can be. We were so fixated on the Tarpon that Karma tugs on my fin and right behind me was a very large Nurse Shark. Once outside the bowl all the Tarpon had gathered and I would say there were at least 20+ of them. We just drifted along enjoying them for



the remainder of the dive. Our third dive was Japanese Gardens which started out great as we enjoyed Big Green Morays getting cleaned by Banded Coral Shrimp and plenty of big Lobsters under the ledges. The current is picking up and we are looking for a cut through the rocks that we are trying to drift thru. So we follow our guide Nemo and as he goes through the cut and the float that he tows gets hung up on the rock and then he is stuck. We are all are drifting now and we can't really help him as he struggles to swim back against the current and unhook the line. Kathy drifts in and tries to help



but pretty soon there is line everywhere. The rest of us hang on just past the cut and watch the show, which fortunately turned out to be fine in the end, except we have lost our Surface Marker. No worries since our group is super prepared so we launch our SMB's so the boat knows where we are. Rack up another great day of diving and we look forward to tomorrow which will be our last day of diving. Time for a cold beverage and a warm up in the Jacuzzi tub. Another spectacular dinner and then we are off to bed so we can dream about all the wonderful things we saw underwater today.

## Day 6

Looks like a rain squall is coming our way this morning, hopefully it will pass and bright sunshine will be around all afternoon. This will be our last day of diving and we have done most of their top dive sites, so I'm not sure where we will be going. Today didn't start out well for me as we headed out to the first dive my dive computer was dead. Oh well, time to sit on the boat bobbing around like a cork for an hour while the group enjoyed the

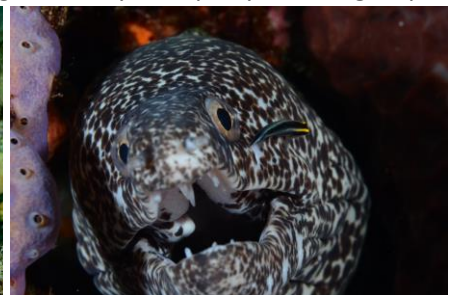


dive. I did see a beautiful colored Portuguese Man-o-War Jellyfish go bobbing by while the group was diving. Kathy had also found one on the beach which had lost its tentacles but I'm pretty sure it is just as poisonous. The



group saw their first Lionfish, a Turtle, more Tarpon and just a very interesting rocky structured bottom. Back at the dive shop luckily they had a battery and I am back up and running. Second dive was an easy reef with Morays, and lots of Scorpionfish. A quick lunch and we decide to go back to Cathedral which was a good choice since we found all kinds of macro critters. We spent the first 25 minutes in about 20 ft of water and there were Jawfish, Mantis Shrimp and Kathy found an Octopus. Once we were down on the reef, Kiki our guide found a nice orange Seahorse, that he had never found before. It was

a really nice easy dive to finish up our trip. The dive center staff is throwing a last day BBQ party for our group,



but a huge rain squall just rolled in so we are waiting for it to pass before heading up for some nice cold beverages. Alex, our boat captain for the week cooked us some great local food including Iguana. It was the first time any of us had tried it and it was really good. A few beers and some dance lessons we make our way down to the pool where they have a steel drum band playing tonight. Chef Jason has cooked up quite the BBQ with ribs and chicken. A few more of those incredible rum punches and



some more dance lessons and it makes for a great party. Time to call it a night as we are touring the rainforest and waterfall tomorrow and it starts early.



## Day 7

Another early morning as we get ready for our tour. Our driver Heston will be here to pick us up at 8:30am so we need to get breakfast and pack everything we need for the day. As Heston drives us to the rainforest, we



make several scenic stops along the way. Since this is a “birding” paradise, we are really hoping to see some cool birds. The first thing he shows us is a Hummingbird nest in a clump of Bamboo, it even has eggs in it. As we are taking pictures the mother Hummingbird shows up and sits on her eggs.

Now that’s a Kodak moment for sure. We then see a tree full of the Orange Winged Parrots



as they are busy eating all the ripe cocoa pods. Ok, this birding thing is pretty cool. As we drive into the Rainforest, Heston spots some really pretty birds and we actually see them even though we have no idea what we are looking at. The winding road into to the



rainforest is beautiful, green, and lush as you drive up towards the top of the hill. We stop at a trail head where a gentleman named Dexter is renting rubber boots, he will also be our guide along the trail. It costs \$22TT (about \$4 US) to rent the boots which was a good idea as the trail was a bit muddy due to the rain we had been having. As we walked along he pointed out birds in the trees, giant spiders, crabs and a unique fish that if it’s on land it starts jumping back to the water. It



was very interesting and well worth the stop if you’re visiting the island and you definitely want to have a guide to show you all the stuff on the trail. I’m not sure how much the guide costs as it was included in our \$40 we paid Heston to drive us around for a half day. On our way back down from the rainforest we stopped at



Argyle Waterfall, which is about a 15-20 minute walk from the parking lot. The cost to enter was \$60TT (\$10 US) and you did have a guide whether you wanted one or not. Even though we were in the dry season there was plenty of water in the waterfall, where you can swim and cool off. Time to head back to the resort for lunch and

of course the dreaded packing. The group meets up at 6:00pm at the pool for our last drinks and dinner of the trip. It's going to be a very early morning as Heston is coming to pick us up at 5:00am, why do flights have to leave at that hour? Everyone makes their way to their rooms for final packing and a few hours of sleep.

#### Day 8

4:00am the alarm clock goes off and we are up and getting ready to go. Dale pulled a "Bob" and woke up at 2:00am, thought the clock said 4:30am so he jumped in the shower and got dressed and ready to go. When he came out of the bathroom Peggy wanted to know why he was showering at 2:00am! After a good laugh, he went back to bed for a couple more hours of sleep. Heston showed up right on time to load all the luggage and Wayne had the resort make us a box breakfast for the road. We had sandwiches, bananas, apples, juice and water, which was very nice of them to do. It is just over an hour drive to the airport from the resort and we make it in plenty of time until we see how slow the line is moving. As you're in line they have a security table set up and they are just randomly grabbing people in line to check their luggage. Since there are no x-ray machines they are doing it by hand and we watch them take a couples entire bags apart and haul everything out of them. The group does a good job scooting by but they finally grab Karma and they look at everything. She does her best sweet talking and it turns out the inspector is a diver so he doesn't tear everything apart in her luggage. They will not check your bags all the way through to Seattle so in JFK we will have to check our luggage and of course pay the luggage fees. We say goodbye to Wayne and make our way to security to wait for the flight. The flight departed on time and we had about a 4 ½ hour flight to JFK. Customs and immigration were really smooth and once you are out and claim your luggage directly outside is the check-in counter for Delta. And yes, we did get hit with luggage fees. We then had to go through security again and this time the line was long and slow and there was no TSA pre-check line. Maria and I were barely able to grab some food for the flight and then hop on board our plane from home. Flight home was uneventful and all our luggage made it upon arrival. Thanks everyone for traveling with me on this trip. I enjoyed having you along for the adventure and I look forward to traveling with you all again.



~Kelley



## Summary:

Tobago is a great destination and should be on your travel list. It is a beautiful island and they are working very hard to keep it that way without big developments. Don't think about retiring here as they make it very difficult for foreigners to stay for any long periods of time. You don't see a lot of expats running around, which is nice as it really keeps the local flavor of the island. This was a very unique destination as the Blue Waters Inn is very popular with the birding community. Blue Waters Dive'n is the dive operation on site and Wayne is working very hard to make this a diving destination. They have new boats on the way, but the boats we were using actually worked fine for the way they run the diving. The crew handles all your equipment up and down the dock so you pretty much carry your mask & fins. The diving here is very unique and is unlike any other Caribbean diving we have done. Since we were diving the Atlantic side, the reef structure is very interesting and the fish life is good with plenty of critters to look at. You can have the opportunity to see large Pelagics on this side, but unfortunately we did not. We did however see the largest school of Tarpon that I have ever seen on an incredible dive called Bookends. The diving here can be very advanced due to the currents and surge so you need to make sure to have an SMB and finger spool in case you get separated from the guide. They do have other dives to choose from that have less current and are better suited for the beginning diver. The boat comes back between dives so you're not out there bobbing around in the swell. We did opt for a third dive for several days, which is available if you want to do more than 2 dives a day. Just make sure to pre-order lunch at breakfast so you can get lunch before the afternoon dive at 2:00pm. The crew cleans your equipment and puts it away for the day, you just need to wash your suit. The resort is very nice and all the rooms face the ocean so you can hear the surf all day and night. There is however one little bird you need to be aware of and that is the Chachalaka, which is pretty much equal to the Caribbean rooster. Every morning they create quite a noisy ruckus to make sure you are not sleeping in. There are plenty of Hummingbirds around and they do put out feeders every morning so if you are on a ground floor the feeders are right by the porch.

The rooms were nice and clean, one building was having water issues but other than that everything worked fine. The hotel is located in a beautiful cove with a gorgeous sandy beach and very easy snorkeling right off the beach. Let's talk about the food. For breakfast there is always fresh fruit out with bread, banana bread and sometimes coconut bread. The cooked breakfast needs some work, not much variety. Lunch is about the same, but the grilled fish is excellent and always a good choice. Dinner however is wonderful and changes every night, and one evening they had a menu of local food which was fantastic. If they could add a little of that flair to breakfast and lunch then it would really make a difference. Both staffs at the hotel and dive center were wonderful and I would definitely come back again. It is a bit difficult to find out information about the diving and the dive center due to the lack of a real website. I would highly recommend putting this destination on your must see list especially if you are looking for something different from the standard Caribbean diving. Go now while it is still unspoiled territory.