

Utila, Honduras March 2011

Route: Seattle—Houston--San Pedro Sula—Utila
Traveling on Continental Airlines & CM Airlines

Day 1:



Departure on the red eye, flight was good and actually left on time. It must be the beginning of Spring Break as there are kids everywhere! No issues with our flight out of Houston and we land in San Pedro Sula right on time. Immigration goes quickly and all our bags made it, yeah! A CM Airline representative meets us and we head to the counter to check in for our last hopper flight to

Utila. We start throwing bags up and he is tagging them and just as I think we are home free on the over luggage issues, there it was, limit 1 bag. We play dumb, but that only gets us so far and we quickly barter down the price for the second bag, which runs at \$30. But, they promise me that all the luggage will make it on the plane. I am skeptical, but hey, you never know. Now comes the fun part of travel, airport taxes. The story goes that because we are in transit we do not have to pay the \$4 tax to leave SPS. The CM



Airline crew is adamant about this so we head to the door to go to the gate escorted by one of the crew and the guy says you have to pay the tax. This starts a flurry of cell phones ringing, people yelling at each other, all the CM Airline crew is there holding their ground. We go back and forth, gather up passports and \$2 from each person, the crew fights hard but in the end we have to pay. Not a surprise, this is how taxes roll in other countries. The funny part is as one gal says to me "yesterday, we pay no taxes", be prepared as rules change on a day-to-day basis. We all have a good chuckle over it and head for our flight.

Our group takes up the entire plane with only a couple more people squeezing on. The flight over to Utila only takes about 30 minutes as we soar over blue water and pinnacles rising up from the deep. It is overcast today with rain, but it is warm and we are on vacation! The Mango Inn group greets us at the Utila airport as we find out that all of our luggage did make it on that tiny plane. It is just a short ride to the



resort as we quickly head to our rooms with a cold beer to unpack and unwind for the rest of the afternoon. We have a dive meeting at 6:30 to go over all the details about our next 5 days of diving. A little dinner and most of us are off to bed, but a few folks headed out on the town to see what Utila offers after dark.



Day 2:

Our day begins with a knock on the door at 6:30 am! It's very funny how "diving vacation" always starts at the crack of dawn! After a quick buffet breakfast we pack and head to the Utila Dive Center. It always seems so crazy the first day when your setting up your gear, figuring out weights, where does all our stuff go, etc, etc. Amazingly, everyone has shown up with all their stuff and so far everything works! We also welcome



two other divers that will be part of our group, Michelle & Sandy, who are Mother & daughter here on vacation as well. Our first dive we head North to Jacks Bight and encounter the invasive Lionfish, and not one, but many. Good dive to shake off the cobwebs and between dives our captain Anthony is on the lookout for Whale Sharks.

It is overcast and raining this morning, which makes it very difficult to see them, along with a good swell. Second dive is Ted's Pt West, where we find plenty of Iridescent Vase Sponge, Grouper and a small wreck. We head back to the dock and we are on our own for lunch as we meander down the road. Part of the group stops at Seven Seas and the rest of us stop at Big Mamas. You don't want to overwhelm a place otherwise you might not get lunch for an hour. Both places have good, inexpensive food. Many of us got quite cold on the second dive so I was on a



mission for a hot coffee and Bundu Café is one of the few cafes with an espresso machine. Time to return to the dive center for the third dive as we head south to Jack Neil Pt. It is a nice wall with lots to offer as we see a Turtle, Big Eagle Ray and a Giant Channel Crab. No whales today, but a good first day of diving. Time for cold beer and a hot shower as we use the rest of the afternoon for exploration around town. Tonight's dinner special is hand made spinach and cheese ravioli, which was great. The Mango Inn is also known for great pizza as they have an actual wood fired pizza oven right in the restaurant. The reports from everyone who ordered pizza tonight was very good. It is barely 8:00 pm as the group starts to drift off to their rooms for an early evening. Chalk up the first dive day, as a great one!

Day 3:

Another cloudy, cool morning and the wind has picked up overnight, so the dive boat heads off to the North side of the island where it is much calmer. The dive site "The Maze" is a vertical wall with great visibility and lots of stinging jellies. I seem to have located a bad one straight across my entire neck. Why is it that the only piece of skin exposed gets zapped by the most wicked stinging creature! Ouch! We keep looking in the blue for anything pelagic to swim by, but no luck today. The sun has come out as we motor to



the second dive called "Little Bight" here we find Toadfish croaking loudly but could never locate the buggers. It is nice and warm this afternoon with blue skies and plenty of sunshine. We actually had to break out the

sunscreen! Lunch today was at Bundu Café for a nice Fish Sandwich then back to the boat for the last dive. Bellies are full as we head toward Silver Gardens, which has a nice school of Spadefish at the surface. I think the snorkel boat stops here, as they seemed to be waiting for a meal, they were just that friendly. We find two fish we have never seen before; we'll have to look them up in the fish book later. At the very end of the dive right under the boat Pat finds a small black Seahorse. Way to go Pat! Another great day of diving, no Whale Sharks yet, but we are still looking. A nice cold beer on the dock in the warm sunshine rounds out a perfect day in Utila.



Day 4:

A little calmer this morning and the sun is out in full, so hopefully we have better luck finding a Whale Shark. The first dive is Duppy Pt, which is a wall dive, and right away we notice that the barrel sponges are spawning. One sponge has some white stuff coming out of it that looks like foam. We spend the surface interval driving around for an hour looking for Whale Sharks. Anthony our boat driver is trying really hard to find us one. It is still pretty choppy, which makes it even harder to see them. Second dive is Airport Caves, and as Bob descends he motions that he hears Dolphins. We find a Giant Green Moray, a big channel Crab, and a Midnight Parrot Fish. We hit the dock and everyone disappears for a quick lunch and then we are right back at it for the third dive. We arrive at Rocky Pt, which has some nice Pillar coral in the shallows. Another hour dive goes by quickly and we head back to the dock as our night dive has been switched to

tonight so we have a couple of hours before we have to be back. Everyone is on for the night dive as we head out to Lighthouse Reef. We are greeted with a chorus of Toadfish croaking, some low and slow, others fast and high pitched. They are taunting us, as we just can't seem to see any of them in the reef. A couple of small Octos were found as well as many small Cryptic Red Crabs. Finally, at about the 45-minute mark, Bob has finally located a Toadfish! He doesn't want to share right away since it took him so long to find it, but he finally gives up and gives the rest of us a glance. Brian is caught being a "light dangler" and has to buy the beer back at the dock. A good night dive as we end our day by chalking up 4 dives, and Hector is there to drive us back to the resort for a late dinner. A few cold Salva Vida beers and it's time to call it a night.

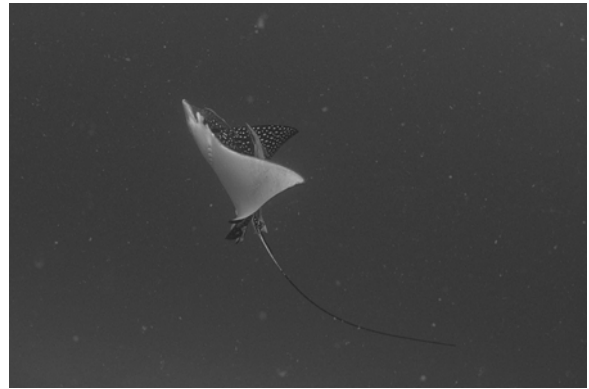
Day 5

Today brings slightly overcast skies again and the wind is already up so it's going to be a bumpy ride. This means that it will be near impossible to find



Whale Sharks. I leave my macro lens on to try and insure us a guaranteed spotting, but no luck. It's gotten really rough and there is literally no place to hide today from the wind. Our first surge dive is on CJ's wall. It is a vertical wall and the top of the reef is surging about 10 ft back and forth. Even down at 70 ft you can still feel it. The visibility is good, with lots of macro animals hiding on the wall.

The ride back around the island is very rough wet one as we stop to dive Jack Neil Beach. I knew sooner or later that having the macro on was going to produce bigger animals. Of course, we see a Turtle and as the Turtle goes up for air, Bob and I are just hanging out waiting for it to come back down when suddenly, out of the shallows



comes a nice big Eagle Ray! Doesn't that just figure! We follow it for a while and it does a u-turn and heads back directly at the group. Luckily, Ken is paying attention as it swims right toward him for a good show. Back to the dock and off to the Bakery for lunch, which has fresh made baguettes for a



great sandwich. Brian goes down hard not feeling well, so we quickly get his stuff packed up and get him a ride back to the resort. Not sure yet but my guess is it's food poisoning. We'll see what happens in a few hours. Dive three is The Lighthouse, which was the same dive we did on the night dive last night. The Toadfish are still taunting us with all their loud croaking, as we still can't locate any of them. Back at the dock we enjoy a nice beer on the deck

in the sun. We all need to do a "NO WIND" chant tonight if we want to have any chance of finding the Whale Sharks. Pam stops and picks Brian up some Ginger Ale and Crackers, we check in on him once we're back, but he's not doing good. We will keep a vigil tonight to make sure he is on the road to recovery in no time.

Day 6

After a night filled with heavy rains, we woke up to partly sunny skies and a slight wind. We had hoped that the wind had died down from yesterday so we can make the attempt to find some whale sharks, but alas it is not to be. We make our way to the north side of the Island taking the long way around and tie up at the site called Spotted Bay. This site starts as a slope then turns in to a shear wall! Bob finds a juvenile Queen Angelfish hidden in a barrel sponge along with all the other cast of characters. Then it is off to

Utopia reef for our second dive and as we jump in we are surrounded by floating plastic garbage. And not just a little plastic, but the entire dive site is swarming in it. We have never seen anything like it. The current has carried it over from the mainland of Honduras. It has been in the water for a long time as hydroids have attached themselves to some of the plastic. Our



group grabs what they can, but it is futile as there is so much of it. After lunch at the Mexican restaurant, the sun comes out in all its glory and we try and find a dive site with no garbage. It is difficult to do today as we have the wind howling and garbage covering the entire South side of the island. Captain Anthony finally takes us to a spot where it is clear of garbage to do our last dive. We name it Angelfish reef as there is every kind of Angelfish and they are not bothered by us in the least. At the safety stop several people spot an Eagle Ray in the shallows. Back to the dock and a few of us decide to hang out and dry our gear and maybe have a few cold ones on the deck. It is St. Patrick's Day and the property next door is holding "Beer Olympics" which of course is just an excuse to party. The music is loud, but enjoyable from our vantage point on the water. Back at the resort we find Brian who has rallied from a horrible bout of food poisoning from the night before. He feels like he has been hit by a truck, and Larry said he took him for a walk, so he is ready to try his luck at some dinner. The rest of us opt for dinner at the resort while the entire island celebrates a bit of the Irish tonight.



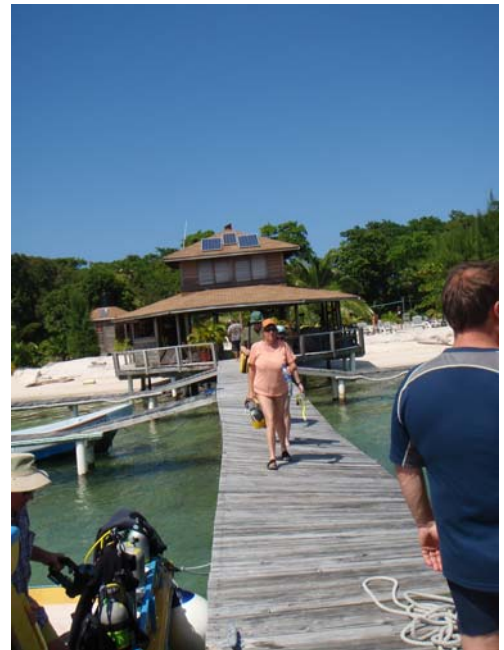
Day 7

The torrential rain on the roof woke me up at about 4:30 am this morning. I toss and turn for the rest of the night hoping that the

seas will be calm enough for us to see the Whale Sharks. Things are looking good at breakfast, not a leaf moving in the trees. We make our way down to the boat at 9:00 am, everyone is very anxious to get out on the water and see what our luck will bring. The sun is shining bright, the seas are calmer but there is still a good size roll to the waves. A good rainsquall finally engulfs us as all eyes are on the water hoping and praying that someone spots something. After 2 ½ hours of searching we are slowly losing hope



that we are not going to see the elusive Whale Shark. We certainly gave it our best shot as we literally circumnavigated the island. Both our boat and the other dive boat meet up at the Purple Pelican for lunch. It is a remote spot that is only reachable by boat with a beautiful sandy beach. We enjoy some cold beers & sodas as we relax and wait for lunch. The wind has picked up significantly again and the ride back is wet and challenging. We gave it our best shot and I guess this trip it just wasn't meant to be. Time to head back to the resort to dry out the remaining equipment and pack our bags for our journey home. We all enjoy our last meal of the trip together and Jimmy from Utila Dive Center shows up to have a beer with the group.



Day 8

Due to the large amount of luggage that our group has, CM Airlines needs us each to put one bag each on the ferry over to San Pedro Sula. They put more people on the flight so there is not enough room for all the luggage. It is scheduled to arrive at the airport around 10:30 am and we are scheduled to arrive there at 9:15 am. As we wait for the plane to arrive it starts to rain and not just a little, but torrential rain. They have all our luggage sitting under the wing of another aircraft, which of course is not staying dry in the least. Our flight arrives a little late, but they quickly load us on for the 30-minute ride over to San Pedro Sula. Upon arrival the CM Airline agent tells us to go ahead and check in at Continental, we all look at each other



skeptically, but it's worth a try. You have to love other countries when they let you check in with only part of your luggage, give you your boarding pass and don't seem too worried about the rest of our bags. In the meantime we go to pay the departure tax, which is now \$37.35 US per person. The funny part about this is that they don't want the .35 cents they want another dollar, so really the departure tax for two people was \$75. Amazingly, our luggage showed up shortly after that by van and we walked over and checked in the last of our bags with ease. Just a couple of security checks and we are at the gate getting ready to board.

Our flights home went smooth and ran on time. In Houston it had to have been one of the fastest customs and immigration checks that we have ever been through. You gotta love that! Everyone's luggage made it back to Seattle so we say goodbye until the next great adventure!



Dale, Peggy, Marle, Mary, Kelley, Brian, Bob, Scott, Pam, Larry, Pat, Ken



Thanks everyone for joining us, we look forward to traveling with you again on our next Adventure!

Kelley & Bob