

# SEA OF CORTEZ

## MIDRIFF ISLANDS

JULY 22-29, 2018

### Anacortes Diving Adventure Team



Toli, Ken, Kelley, Craig, Tom, Matt, Rachel, Scott  
Bob, Chelsi, Lindsey, Terri, Russ

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July 22-July 29, 2018

Route-Bellingham—Portland—Phoenix AZ Carrier- Alaska Airlines

## Day 1

Everyone is flying in the day before just to make sure all our bags make it and no one misses the transfer. If you miss the transfer that takes us down to Puerto Penasco then you will miss the entire trip. We arrived early in Phoenix around noon and took the free shuttle to the Drury Airport Hotel. Once we were checked in we decided to go to lunch. Just down the road about 2 miles is a family run BBQ place called “Little Miss BBQ”. The shuttle bus driver says he could take us down there and drop us off. Perfect. One problem. We didn’t see the huge line waiting to get in! Oh well, we are committed. Apparently this is the norm here because they have water stations along the line, it’s covered with misting spray blowing continuously. The family comes around with tasters and keeps you informed on the line wait. We are 50 minutes to the front door. That doesn’t sound too bad. In the meantime you are advised of the menu, how to order and watch to see if they sell out of products before you reach the front. When you reach the counter you need to be prepared to order just like the “Soup Nazi” line in Seinfeld. So, after 1.2 hours we finally reached the front, and yes it was 110 F outside. Everyone is super friendly and quite patient since the group in front of us were not prepared with their orders. The inside of the place might seat 12 people, but they have plenty of picnic tables outside under shade and surrounded by water misters. It was perfectly cool and comfortable while we enjoyed, brisket, pulled pork, pork ribs, slaw, beans and pickles. No alcohol here, but some of the best BBQ I have ever eaten. Completely stuffed, we called the hotel and they came down and picked us up. Super nice of them. Back at the hotel we jump in the pool and enjoy the rest of the afternoon as everyone arrives throughout the day. At 5:30 pm the hotel offers a “kickback” which is 3 free drinks and food. You can definitely make dinner out of it as they had green salad, pasta, baked potatoes, chili, hotdogs and nachos. We were still stuffed from lunch so we just enjoyed the free drinks. After a nice shower we went next door to the Hilton for drinks because the Drury has no bar or restaurant. Back to the hotel to call it a night and have a leisurely morning tomorrow.

## Day 2

We slept until about 8 am and decided we wanted to do a walk before it got too hot. We were too late. We walked for about 20 minutes and had to turn around it was just too much. Breakfast ran until 10 am so a quick shower and down for breakfast which consists of waffles, scrambled eggs, tortillas, cheese, sausage, granola, cereal, fruit, yogurt, sweet pastries with coffee and juice. Completely stuffed once more, back to the room for final pack and check out. The transfer company “Head out to Rocky Point” showed up just before 1 pm in 2 vans pulling trailers for all our luggage. It is a 4 hour drive to Mexico so off we go. After 2 hours we stop in Ajo for a



bathroom break and snack, then back on the road for the border. We now have to stop at the border and buy a visa for \$35 USD. Only because we are staying 8 days instead of 7 days. We never paid it before, but now it is required which puts us behind schedule about 30 minutes. We finally arrive at the harbor around 5:30 pm and the boat is not ready for us. After a lot of discussion, the crew finally comes up and gets our luggage and shortly thereafter we board the boat. We see a few familiar faces from last year. Edgar and Juan which we had as dive guides before and a few more crew members. So nice to see familiar



faces. Once on board the crew is very busy working on the engine and we cannot go downstairs to our cabins. We keep ourselves busy setting up our dive gear and enjoying a few cold beverages. After 2 hours we are good to go for departure and we push off the dock. Our crossing is absolutely flat calm as we leave the dock. After an amazing dinner, we are unpacked and ready for bed. We call it a night and dream of what tomorrow will bring.

### Day 3

We arrive at the N. end of Angel De La Guarda Island around 10:30 am. The crossing was like glass and it still is this morning. Of course when we stop it is brutally hot and no wind so it must be time to dive. The temp of the water dropped to about 73 degrees down around 50 ft, so be prepared for colder water. Up towards the surface



it feels like a Jacuzzi compared to the bottom. Our checkout dive goes well even though the visibility is pretty low at about 10-15 ft. Feels like home. We spot our first Jawfish, with the Bluespotted in Nuptial phase and a fine spotted giant Jawfish with eggs. Lots of little stingrays swimming around us

and a few Nudibranchs on the wall as we start our ascent. Back to the boat for lunch and then on to the second dive. We move the boat closer to the large pinnacle rock covered in snow. We have a bit more current for this dive, plenty of Sealion action and too many Nudibranchs to count. We did find a mating pair of Octopus and also several others. The highlight for our dive guide Juan was seeing a small Plume Blenny. He said this was only the 3<sup>rd</sup> time he has ever seen one. Congratulations to Mary who hit her 1400 dive! Back on the boat for some cold beverages as we are just doing the 2 dives today. We move the boat around the island and anchor up for a sunset cruise. Several of us load up in the dingys with cold drinks and cruise the beach looking at all the Sealions, big males, females and tiny babies. Lots of Pelicans and other birds. It is beautiful out on the water at the end of



the day, it is so calm and peaceful. Back on the boat we motor to another site where we will watch the sun going down and anchor up for dinner. Another fabulous meal by Joshua! This chef is amazing and his vegetarian dishes are just as good. The boat won't move until around 3 am to get us to the NE side of the island for our first dives. Everyone starts to wind down and head for their bunks.



### Day 4

Still barely a ripple on the water this morning as we arrive at the new site. Dive brief is at 7 am and in the water group B goes this morning. The visibility is much better today, more like 40+ft. We drop into the sand and start to see plenty of male blue spotted Jawfish, Orange throat Pike blenny, and a Gulf signal blenny. Not to mention the 4 Giant Green Morays and octopus on the reef. Really a nice dive with plenty to see. We will be here all day to see what the pinnacle has to offer us.



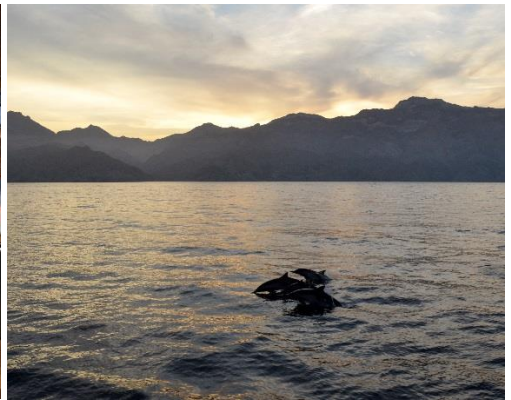
Time for real breakfast while we wait for the next dive at 11 am. Just as we start to get ready for the dive a big wind comes up and starts to blow everything off the deck and the white caps are getting bigger. Hunker down, seems like a small Torrito. Second dive was pretty exciting with all sorts of current as we hide behind the small pinnacle. We had 2 different pairs of mating octopus out on the wall, lots of fish life and some nudibranchs. At the end of the dive is where it gets really exciting. First, Bob and I try to cross the little channel between pinnacles and that just wasn't happening as I got washed off the rocks and scrambled to get back. Then we see Toli pointing

frantically down at us from the surface as we see his GoPro sitting on the reef. Craig picks it up, all good. We then go to the safety stop and deploy our SMB's and woosh people are gone. Craig got pulled in a down current and unfortunately Toli's camera lanyard snapped and we lost his camera again. Bummer. Back to the boat and



we have a juvenile Pelican hanging out and won't let anyone down the stairs to the platform. That is a big beak as he tries to bite the crew. After lunch we are laying around and a big swell comes in and the panga goes under the platform and promptly pops a big hole in the good panga. Not good. Plans have changed since we only have 1 panga, so group B will dive first and then group A will go when we get back. At least we are diving. On the third dive we jumped back on the pinnacle and Chelsi spots the GoPro in about 2 minutes. Certainly Toli's lucky day! We had a nice Octo out and cruising around the sand hunting. Back on board we have a lot of bees flying around looking for fresh water and unfortunately Rachel gets stung on the platform. \*&%& little buggers! When group A gets back from their dive, the call is made that we will not be night diving. Both dingy's are

compromised and the captain doesn't feel comfortable diving from the big boat that close to the rocks. They call us for dinner and just as we are about to have dessert we are alerted that there are Dolphins on the side of the boat. We hustle out to find hundreds of Dolphins all around us. There are tiny babies in the mix keeping up with the adults. Amazing sight to see at the end of the day and all for Juan since it is his birthday today. They keep up with us for a long time as the sun is setting behind the mountains. Such a magical moment. We head back to the dining room to have dessert and sing Happy Birthday to Juan. A great finish to the day. Our change of plan is we



will now motor 6 hours over to Bahia de la Los Angeles where we will snorkel with the Whale Sharks in the morning while someone is driving 2 new pangas down to us to exchange for the 2 that are flat. This crew will do whatever it takes to get this boat back up and diving. Another end to a great day.

## Day 5

An early day as we anticipate our snorkel with the Whale Sharks. The bay is calm and the sun is shining so it will be much easier to spot them. The crew uses 2 local fishing pangas who specialize in doing the snorkel. You can only have 4 snorkelers in the water at a time and only 4 per whale shark. There are only our 2 boats in the bay this morning looking for the sharks. After about an hour, it is starting to settle in that maybe we won't see them. We stop the boats and go for a swim to cool off and regroup before heading out to try again. Back on board we resume our hunt and then like magic, we spot one. The first 4 get ready and off we go. It is a fast a furious pace





unless they stop to feed. Kick like crazy to keep up for 2 minutes of fun and then get picked up by the boat. Round and round we go for the next 3 hours. We have lots of people who have never seen a Whale Shark before so this is great because every single person gets an encounter. Exhausted and hungry our 4 hours are up. Back to the boat for lunch and definitely a nap. In the meantime, 2 pangas arrive to take the place of our broken ones as the crew frantically tries to put all the pieces together before the dive. It does not look like fun. Finally they have 1 ready and we have one of the fishing boats stay to take us diving as well. While we are diving they are working hard to get the second one put together. We get one more dive in before dark and have a wonderful dinner as we start a 10 hour cruise to San Pedro Marti. There is a storm (torrito) ahead somewhere along the journey so we want to make sure to tie everything down as it will probably get rough.

## Day 6

Another early morning as we prepare for SeaLions today. We are now in 3 groups since one of our pangas is much smaller now. The sun finally comes out and it is relatively calm behind the island. We hear lots of Sealions barking so hopefully they will come for a visit. Lots of brown Boobies are making their home on the boat which is quite entertaining to watch them all fight for position. The dive has a beautiful wall of gorgonians and black coral, really stunning. The water here is warm and the visibility is much better. At the end of the dive we come back into the shallows and hope for a little Sealion fun. The big male barks and blows bubbles but several of the



sealions come down and swim around us. They too probably still have to wake up. Dive 2 was all about the Sealions and we had a really good show. They were very playful and kept coming back over and over. Edgar spent the entire dive looking for Seahorse's and found nothing. Last year Juan had found up to 17 on this one dive. So far this year they have been skunked. After lunch we flew the drones and had a Booby land on the boat that had a fishing lure dangling about 4 feet below it. Mary climbed on the freezer and snagged the lure and



brought it to the deck. We quickly covered it with a towel and found a double hook lodged in its skin. We had to get someone with bolt cutters to cut the hook and we finally got it out. Good team effort. He hung around for a couple of hours on the boat and then flew away. Our 3<sup>rd</sup> dive was a side trip into a very large cave and then we jumped out into the fast current for a quick drift down the reef. Beautiful black coral and gorgonians all over and a cold thermocline





of 70 degrees! Brrr. Congratulations to Terri who did her 200<sup>th</sup> dive today!! As we get back on the boat Juan's group reports they have found the Mohawk blenny that I have been wanting to see. This is like finding the unicorn! Yes, Russ and Mary have photo proof and it is beautiful. Juan marked it with his SMB so I scramble to change my port and back in my gear. It is only in 30 feet of water so we won't need much time. Quickly down the float and there it is. Amazing. I can't believe Juan found it. Bob, Chelsi and I take a load of photos and back to the boat. Another amazing dinner and time for a night dive.



## Day 7

We have to start super early so we can get 2 dives in before we have to travel for 4 hours to start our way back toward Puerto Penasco. First group jumped in the panga at 6 am and the rest of us followed. It is really rough this morning so hopefully we won't be staying on this side of the island for too long. We decided to stay here for the additional dives because this is the best visibility. Once we cross over the visibility will go back to about 10-15 ft. For the second dive we move around to the calm side of the island. We do Arroyo again which is an



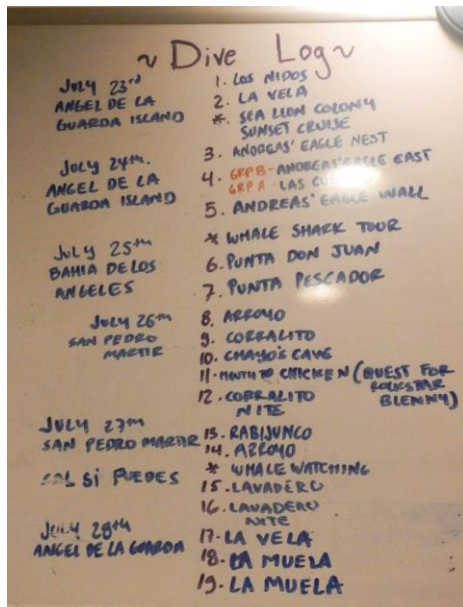
amazing dive with the black coral wall and we drifted at the end to see 4 Turtles and a huge field of nesting Triggerfish. During our transit we are on the lookout for whales, but it is rough so it makes it pretty difficult. We make it to the other side in about 5 hours and as soon as the anchor goes down we are in the skiffs and diving. Back to cold water and limited vis, but still plenty of critters to see like a giant jawfish with eggs. Back on the boat for dinner and the night dive is really late. The word got out that it was Bob and I's 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary so they decorated a dessert plate for us. Only 4 hardy souls are game for the night dive, which they were lucky enough to see a Horn Shark. Too bad Edgar that you didn't go, wah, wah. The rest of us are exhausted from such an early morning, so off to bed we go.



## Day 8

We spent the entire night motoring north to arrive at the dive site around 7:30 am. The crew is trying to squeeze in 2 dives before we need to start motoring toward home. The first dive is Toli's 100<sup>th</sup> dive so they went to 100 ft and drank a coke underwater. Congratulations Toli! For the second dive Chelsi is hitting her 100<sup>th</sup> dive and she decides that she is going to dive naked...well sort of... she went behind a rock and dropped her drawers to flash the blennies! Upon surfacing cold beers were waiting. Congratulations Chelsi! Back on board the





crew thinks they can sneak in one more dive for those with a late flight so Ken, Terri and Lindsey take them up on it. Back on board we quickly load the skiff and away we go. The crew is busy rinsing all the gear and hanging it up to dry. At 5 we have a boat presentation and I show a few photos of the week highlights of some cool critters that we found. Time for packing and relaxing before Joshua serves us another amazing meal. A great finish to a really fun trip. We will be motoring all night to make it back to port in the wee hours of the morning.

#### Day 9

Many are up early taking showers and finishing up the last minute packing. The crew puts out a continental breakfast and coffee for everyone before our ride shows up to shuttle us back to the airport. After our group photos and goodbyes we load up the 2 vans and away we go. When we hit the border this time we have to take all our luggage inside to go thru customs and immigration. They don't even look at any

of the luggage and just want to see our passports. They didn't even ask to see the paperwork that we had to fill out on the way down. Juan and Pepe the captain are traveling back with us to catch a flight and they hold Pepe up for a while grilling him pretty good. Finally, everyone is thru and away we go. The ride back is pretty uneventful and we make it to the airport in plenty of time to catch our 2:00 pm flight to Seattle. Made it back to Anacortes with no issues and all our luggage showed up. Perfect ending to the trip.



Bob and I would like to thank all of you for traveling with us on this fun trip to Mexico. We valued the time we spent with you and having fun with the crew again. We look forward to traveling with you again in the near future!

Kelley & Bob