



## **A Birthday Cruise to East of Flores, Oct. 18 - 30, 2015**

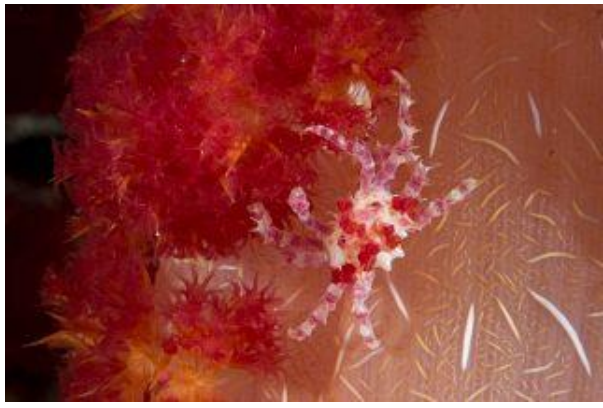
*Trip report by Lynn Morton with photos by Lynn Morton, Dan Richards & James Rockafellow.*

I never realized when I put together this charter that we would have so many birthdays. But can you imagine a better way to celebrate than having dinner under the stars with a birthday cake on the Seven Seas? It can certainly make for a memorable birthday.

Our group started in Bali with 10 days of diving and exploring. That was when we had our first birthday with Rocky's on Oct. 12th. We all got a present when Mt. Agung decided not to erupt and we had no snafus getting to Maumere on the 18th along with our last group member, Rebecca, joining us. For me, Michael, Dan, Sarah, David, Rob, & Natalie, it was great to be returning to the Seven Seas and seeing all the familiar faces. Our group of 14 divers and 2 snorkelers boarded filled with anticipation of the great times ahead of us. We capped our first night on the boat singing happy birthday to Dave. That was #2.

Diving began on Oct. 19 at Dambili Point. This was snorkeler Sarah's favorite spot because there was so much for them to see in the shallows with tons of brightly colored fish and nice corals. She and Natalie, our other snorkeler, spotted 2 blue ribbon eels, frogfish, and it was so clear they could even see nudibranchs. At Dambili, Deep Dive, and Crack Point, divers saw orangutan crabs, soft coral squat lobsters, bi-color and decorated dartfish, a large school of bannerfish, a patrolling blacktip, turtles, a yellow margin moray, and a beautiful white leaf scorpionfish.





It was perfect because it was Sarah's birthday that day. Our dive guides, Irwan, Jeffrey, and Frengke prepared a special surprise for her next to one of the frogfish.

As that day and the next day progressed, it was so much fun to watch the excitement grow. A fair number of the group had never been diving in the South Pacific and half had never been to Indonesia. Coral triangle 1st timers Rocky, Marcia, and Barbara were amazed by the diversity and richness of the reefs. We saw more blacktips along with white tip reef sharks and a dogtooth tuna and Mike found his favorite critter on the night dive at Rush Hour. A cuttlefish!

Lisa's favorite dive was at Alcatraz on the 3rd day, and I just might have to agree with her. The Wall was so amazingly beautiful with vibrant colors of corals, sponges, and it was filled with life. On the Wall, at Hungry Eel, and then on the night dive at Escape from Alcatraz, we found many nudibranchs, including a several pairs of mating *Nembrotha rutilans*. I found my first Long-nosed Hawkfish for the trip.







Topside, between dives, there was a pair of Sea Eagles with their juvenile that was bigger than either of them. The crew tossed food scraps in the water and gave us some wonderful photo ops.

But I think the all-around favorite dive spot was the next day. We did all 4 dives at Beag Abang and the muck delivered one treasured sighting after another. We saw several varieties of octopus, including Wunderpus, and peacock mantis shrimp were everywhere. There were frogfish, sea moths, and many Ornate, Robust, and even a Roughsnout Ghost Pipefish. It was John's first-ever sighting of a Robust. But John's and Chris' favorite sighting of the entire trip was the four courting cuttlefish. When the female finally made her choice, they watched them mating. The happy couple was so absorbed, they swam right by Chris and he was able to stroke their backs.







The highlight at Beag Abang was that David was sure he saw what may be a new species of hawkfish, but sadly we weren't able to get a picture of it. He has worked on a number of fish surveys and David is no slouch about such things. He has an anthias named after him that he discovered in Australia and was later confirmed by Jack Randall - *Pseudanthias sheni*. Maybe *Cirrhitichthys sheni* is in his future?

The next day was Marcia's birthday and we celebrated with two great dives at Board Room and New World. Then many of us went on a land tour to visit Watubelapi village where we had a demonstration of their custom dancing and ceremonies. Afterwards, they held a market with their own beautiful ikats and crafts. Traveling there and back, we had a driver with the most amazing collection of windshield paraphernalia. Besides several strings of small stuffed figurines that stretched from side to side, I counted 36 mirrors attached all across the width. It was amazing he could see through all of it, but it seemed to be a local custom. All the other vans had them as well.

Day 6 was Nemo City and Mucky Mosque. Nemo City was an endless carpet of anemones and their commensal Clark's Anemonefish. Tucked between the anemones, we found several peacock mantis shrimp moving about. It was also home for a surprising number of nudibranchs, including a *Glossodorisavernis* and a beautiful *Halgerda* sp. Another find, and favorite for many in but particularly delighting Marcia, were the beautiful Mandarinfish.

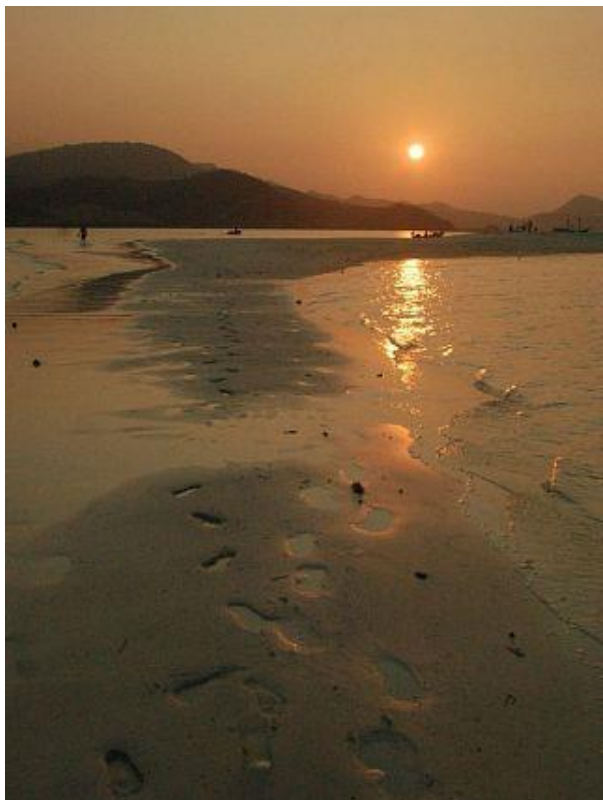




It was a short day because we traveled to the Komba volcano that afternoon. Daylight showed us that the volcano was quite active. That evening, we had an amazing display of fireworks along with cocktails and dinner. It's a floor show that really can't be beat! Dan and Rocky both said this was the best thing topside for the entire trip.

We dove around Komba for our 7th day and Barbara really noticed all the diversity there. For our 8th, 9th and 10th days, the diving continued to give each of us new and exciting things to see. On the 9th day, we did a dusk excursion and watched as a seemingly endless flow of thousands and thousands of fruit bats streamed across the sky to their nighttime feeding grounds on another island. We watched until it became too dark to see and still they kept coming. It was yet another amazing sight on this cruise. One the 10th day, Nancy's favorite sighting was of 3 frogfish all close together, mimicking the color of the sponge where they were perched.

On the evening of the 10th, we decided to skip the night dive to have a picnic dinner on the beach. The glorious sunset, streaming bats (again!), and being serenaded by the crew all made for a wonderful birthday party for Rob, our 5th and last birthday for the trip. It was the perfect crowning touch.



Day 11 was a return to Dambila Point for our final dives. The afternoon was filled with a visit to Tapala, a village famous for their ikats. We drank arak, chewed betel nuts, and smoked the local cigarettes. Then we watched a very entertaining demonstration of dances with explanations by our excellent guide. To finish off that part, two of our group were dressed in traditional costumes and then joined in the dancing. It was hilarious! Afterwards, we were given a full demonstration of the spinning, dyeing, and weaving involved in creating a traditional ikat. To finish, we were given the chance to purchase these works of art directly from the weavers that created them. It was an outstanding tour and a fitting end to a wonderful trip on the Seven Seas. But really, what more can you expect from such a great boat? Thanks to all of the wonderful crew for giving my group a trip they will always remember!

Lynn Morton

East of Flores, October 2015





