

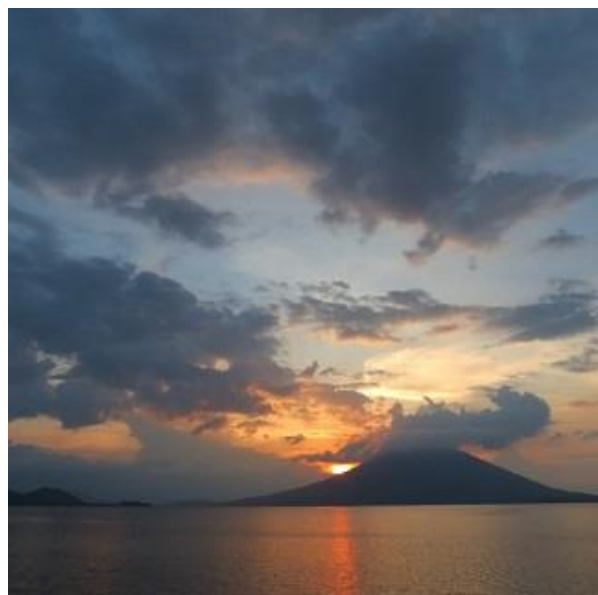


Advanced and Nitrox Certification Course in the Forgotten Islands

Trip Report by the Argyropoulos Family

04 November 2013 - Day 1

After traveling all night from Maumere we woke up in a beautiful spot, Ipet, where we were surrounded by sandpits and mangrove forests and had volcanos off in the distance. After a brief overview of the ships features and the diving equipment, we went for our first dive at "Rays Rush Hour". We were astonished by the amount of Blue Spotted Stingrays we saw racing about the ocean floor. When we got back to the ship, Linda gave us our materials for our Nitrox certification course and we had lunch. Our next dive was at the "Ipet Drop Off" where we saw a lot of big sharks, tunas, and more stingrays. Around 5:00pm we headed out to a sandbar to have some drinks and snacks and watch the sun go down. On our way back to the boat we watched thousands of bats fly from a mangrove forest right over our heads towards the main island. When we returned to the Seven Seas we ate dinner and had the pleasure of meeting the entire crew of 16 people who told us where they were from and their positions on the boat. The crew's friendly attitude showed that they cared and made us feel at home. This marked the beginning of our journey.



05 November 2013 - Day 2

We woke up feeling rested and comfortable and headed out for our first drift dive. This was a learning experience as we dialed in our neutral buoyancy and coasted by coral heads encountering

various sea life along the way. After lunch we traveled to Nera and immediately went snorkeling through a mangrove forest. The water was shallow and the floor was covered with thousands of baby mangroves that looked like tiny wooden spikes poking through the sand. On our way back from the snorkel we were surprised by a blue whale which was breaching right in front of our tender! After returning to the Seven Seas we had a big dinner and finished the bookwork for our Nitrox course.

06 November 2013 - Day 3

On day 3 we arrived at Pulau Rusa or "Deer Island" which had beautiful sand beaches, stunning rock formations and cliffs along its coast. The tidal swings were 2 meters due to the recent new moon. We dove the "Pulau Rusa Pinnacle" in the morning at the turn of low tide pushing high. There were strong downward currents and surges throughout the dive making it tiresome but we saw a wide variety of corals and fish including dogtooth tuna, sweet lips, lionfish, and snapper. This was also our first dive using Nitrox. The weather picked up in the afternoon so we chose not to dive. Instead, we began our Advanced Diver Certification course and completed our knowledge review for the underwater navigation course. We hung out on the Seven Seas for the rest of the day, had a relaxing dinner and went to bed early.

07 November 2013 - Day 4

After motoring all night we woke up at the island Pantar in front of a small beach village called BeangaBang. That morning we went for our advanced diver certification navigation dive with our instructor, Linda, where we practiced our underwater compass skills on a sandy sea floor covered with a variety of corals and critters of all shapes and colors. After our dive we returned for breakfast and decided to take it easy during the day and complete the bookwork for the night dive section of our advanced diver certification. We didn't dive again until 6:00pm when Karl took us on our first night dive! It was amazing... We saw baby reef octopus, juvenile and full grown lion fish, blue spotted rays, tons of squid, and had a common pufferfish follow us around for quite some time. We were also amazed by the bioluminescence in the water when we turned off our lights!



08 November 2013 - Day 5

This morning we arrived in Alor where we went into town to stock up on supplies before heading east for the Forgotten Islands. We started our excursion at an internet cafe to catch up on emails. When we were finished there we jumped on the back of some locals' scooters and met up with our mom and Karl at the market. We looked around the market and picked up some local food and some

betul nut. We smoked some of the native tobacco and bought some t-shirts before heading back to the boat. Next we motored to a nearby bay where we relaxed on the boat and enjoyed the scenery. In the afternoon an older local paddled up to us in his canoe and showed us his homemade wooden goggles. My mom ended up buying a pair of the goggles and before dark we headed back to Alor to anchor. Once we arrived we went for a night dive which was filled with critters including cuttlefish, porcupine fish and array of colorful soft corals.

09 November 2013 - Day 6

We began the day by motoring to a dive site near Alor. On the way there we saw a huge school of dolphins which were jumping and playing and came very close to the boat. For our morning dive we went to "Anemone City" which was a mild drift dive covered with soft corals and various smaller fish. We've never seen so many anemones in one place before, it was amazing! When we got back to the Seven Seas some local boys paddled up to us in their canoes. We gave them some cookies and apples and they hung out around the boat for most of the day. In the afternoon, Linda and I dove a cool reef wall where we saw a bunch of the local fish traps made out of wood. It was a bit sad to see how their traps broke through the coral as they barrel downwards towards the seafloor. At night we anchored in Alor again preparing to leave for Wetar early in the morning.



10 November 2013 - Day 7

Today we left Alor early in the morning to head to Wetar. Around noon we spotted a few sperm whales so we hopped in the rubber boat to try and swim with them. We had to use the rubber boat because we were in open waters so there was a fear that if the winds came up the crew would have difficulty lifting the tender with the crane. After a few minutes of motoring around with the rubber boat we found the bull swimming by himself. Once we were close enough we jumped in the water and began to approach him. Just as the whale came in sight underwater, he released a brown cloud of fecal matter (which we were lucky enough to capture on film) and swam away. After a few more attempts to swim with the sperm whales, we went back to the Seven Seas where the 6 whales later came back and swam right beside us! The rest of the day was spent traveling to Wetar and finished our knowledge review for our Drift Dive along the way.

11 November 2013 - Day 8

This morning we woke up in Wetar and went for a dive at the Reong Wall. On the dive we saw lots of red tooth triggerfish, black triggerfish, a few big jacks, and many different species of angelfish. When

we got back to the boat we hung out for a bit when the crew notified us that they had seen a saltwater crocodile! We went out to meet them and see the crocodile, which was about 10 feet long and had two rows of spiny scales on his powerful tale. After following him around for a while, we went back to the boat for lunch. In the afternoon we hung on the boat and swam nearby while my mom went into the village to look around and at 5pm we departed for Romang.



12 November 2013 - Day 9

Today we awoke in Romang at Zwaan Bay, a beautiful, calm bay surrounded by coconut palms and a few small villages. The locals brought us some young coconuts before our first dive at a shallow reef just outside the bay. This was the perfect dive for the fish identification portion of our advanced scuba certification. The seafloor was sandy and covered with a variety of soft and hard corals and a diverse array of fish. After our fish identification dive we hung out on the boat and completed the deep dive section of our advanced diver certification. In the afternoon we went out and completed our deep water dive and become certified advanced divers! For dinner the crew baked me (Alex) a chocolate cake for my birthday! They all came up top to bring out the cake and brought guitars, shakers and hand drums singing birthday songs in both Indonesian and English! It was a very memorable birthday thank you Seven Seas crew for making my birthday so special!



13 November 2013 - Day 10

For Day 10 we were in Moa. The change in the sea life became apparent during our first dive at Selat Moa. Due to the currents and the location within a channel, this wall dive had more schools of fish we'd seen throughout the entire trip. Right when we got in the water we were surrounded by huge schools of blue streak fusiliers, rainbow runners, various snappers and angelfish, and even a school of bluefin trivially. Towards the end of our dive we explored the top of the reef where we saw two flag-tail grouper fighting! They were locked mouth to mouth and swam around aggressively while attached to each other. After lunch we traveled east along the northern coast of Moa and dove again at 2:00pm at a seawall with an east to west current. As we drifted along the wall with the current we saw some massive fish. There was a school of long fin spade fish that were particularly large as well as a napoleon wrasse that lurked underneath us for about 10 minutes before disappearing into the deep. When we returned to the boat we began motoring for our next destination and went to sleep.

14 November 2013 - Day 11

After a long night of traveling through thunderstorms with howling winds, we were quite restless come the morning. Still, we rallied and went for a morning dive at an island called Kalapa. This dive was called Tanjung Ponelau and it was beautiful. Right when we got in the water we were surrounded by blue streak fusiliers. The reef was covered with hard and soft corals of every color imaginable. There were massive fans and sponges as well. We took it easy for the rest of the day, everyone was pretty tired from the previous night. Still, we enjoyed the beautiful scenery and were happy to be in paradise for another day. We were also very excited to finally arrive in Dai, the island we had heard so much about.



15 November 2013 - Day 12

When we arrived in Dai, Karl went to the village to ask permission for us to dive. Upon being granted permission from the village chief, we went out to a point the crew has named "To Dai For" which we very shortly understood. The point dropped off and the wall contained massive fans and a wide variety of coral. This spot was most memorable for its schools of giant fish. We were circled by schools of barracuda, unicorn fish, and fusiliers. We also saw some huge dogtooth and humphead wrasse. This was our favorite dive to date! That afternoon we traveled to the other side of Dai to ask permission to dive in front of a different village. Unfortunately, the village king wasn't present so we

were unable to dive. That evening we returned to the previous spot and went for a night dive one point over at "Dai Point East". The night dive was great, we saw a bunch of lion fish and sleeping parrotfish and were very surprised when we found a family of 5 lobsters living under a rock.

16 November 2013 - Day 13

We stayed the night in Dai and started the day by diving at "Dai Point East" again. There wasn't much going on in the depths and along the wall so we surfaced a bit and ended up exploring the top of the reef which had a wide variety of small colorful fish and pristine corals. After breakfast we dove at "To Dai For" and were again surrounded by huge schools of bluestreak fusiliers and black fin barracuda. We also saw a very large Dogtooth Tuna. When we got back to Seven Seas we ate lunch and departed for our next location which would take about 16 hours. We were in the open sea when the sun went down and the water was like glass. The combination of the glassy water, the low floating multi textured clouds, the rainbow off in the distance, and dolphin playing at the bow and the nearly full moon made this the most memorable sunset we've had. Since there was no wind and the moon was so bright we were able to eat dinner outside while we were still motoring.

17 November 2013 - Day 14

Day 14 we woke up in the Taninbar Islands with calm seas and almost no wind. The conditions were perfect for our last day of diving. We dove at a shallow reef off of the island called "Pulau Kyabrengan" which had an eclectic variety of fish species. There were also some vibrant giant clams and a few particularly large grouper. The winds picked up a bit around noon so we decided to hang out at the boat during the day. My mom went snorkeling at a nearby island for a bit while we laid low. At 6:00pm the winds had died and we went on our final dive and final night dive of our trip. It started out uneventful but after about 15 minutes we found our way to the reef which was completely buzzing. We saw some very large sleeping grouper and parrotfish. We also saw a few feather stars and a bunch of hermit crabs. We came out of the water to a full moon and once again ate dinner outside. It was a fantastic ending to magical vacation.

