



## Christmas at Cannibal Rock

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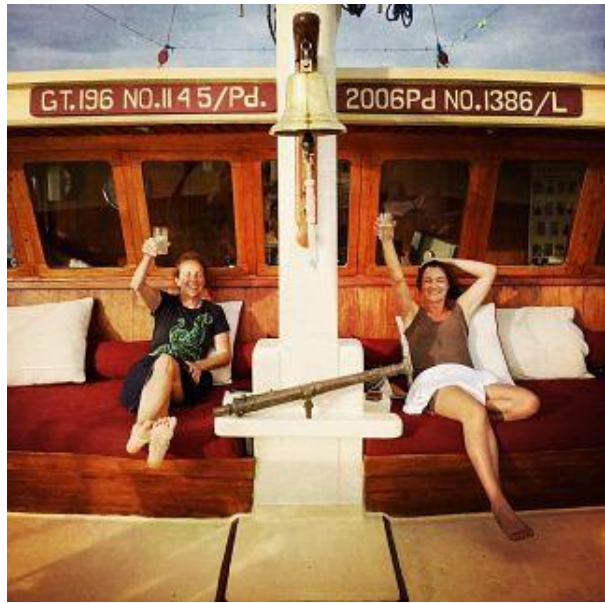
Once again the clear warm currents arrived in the Southern parts of Komodo National Park, perfectly in time for Christmas. This would be the start of our second season in South Komodo.

We were joined by my wife Tuti and our two boys and a group of old friends with new family's of their own. Some of them I had not seen for 20 years, and now they were accompanied by kids I'd heard of but never met. Aunty Valerie was along as well as the story teller. She would be my secret weapon if things got out of hand. We had talked of this trip for 10 years and now it was a reality.

Nine kids and eight adults. Could be trouble as the oldies were outnumbered and young pirates always cause trouble. Mutiny could be stirring so I decided to play it tough right from the start. "*Hey you Pirates! You don't want to end up in the dark smelly rat infested chain locker in the bow!*" I explained to the young rascals upon boarding.

In just a couple hours after landing in Labuan Bajo we had steamed out of port and were already in the water. A few of the boys had just completed their dive courses with my brother Greg's operation *Dive Komodo*, in the days before boarding. The instructors were great and had taken a liking to the boys so we decided that Greg and his team would come on his live aboard Tatawa and spend the Christmas break with us in a few days time.

We headed out to Padar to settle in. And yes, the warm clear currents had arrived in December and flooded the south. It's South Komodo at its best that way. Crystal clear water, flat calm and no other boats in sight. We felt like we were the only people on the planet!



It wasn't long before we were all reacquainted. We dived, snorkeled, kayaked, played and beach-combed the days away during the lead up to Christmas. The dive site Three Sisters is always at its best during the wet season and it did not let us down. I even managed to sneak down to the seldom visited 4th sister for my seasonal visit and she was more beautiful than ever.

A few days into the trip we were joined by Greg, his family, and the team on the Tatawa, and we rafted up alongside before heading down to South Rinca. Coming from the east coast of Australia, the children could all swim like fish so we had the younger kids out doing bubble blower intro dives in a word class environment. I couldn't help thinking how lucky they were.



With the Tatawa alongside us, Yaya and Widi had their hands full. They were cooking for 40 people and if you haven't been on the Seven Seas recently..., I don't know how they do it! But the food just keeps getting better.

Christmas arrived and all the usual festivities that come with it. We decided to do just one dive that day and I could think of no better place than a Christmas dive on Cannibal Rock. The site really put a good show on for us with thousands of fish in clear water. It's not until you dive Cannibal in clear water that you realize just how fishy it can get there. The current had the soft corals out, making it one of the most colorful fish-filled experiences one could possibly imagine.





The rest of the day was spent lounging around on the boat, eating, drinking and relaxing as one should on Christmas Day. The Christmas dive on Cannibal set the mood for the rest of the day. We watched the sunset into the Western entrance of horseshoe bay from a small white sandy beach on Kode island with perhaps one too many drinks in hand. It was quite a sight to see the South coast of Rinca Island towering into the sky and wrapped around us like a big blanket of beauty.



That was the end of a perfect day! But there was more fun to come.



We sailed to "The Wild South" Komodo of Komodo Islands. Not many mantas there in this season, not even in Manta Alley, as the water is clear now and there is no plankton for the mantas to eat here. The snorkelers did see a small one but that doesn't count. And in the South Komodo season we come to this site for a different reason...

Like Three Sisters and Cannibal, Manta Alley is one of the best dives in the park during the South Komodo season. When the conditions are right, and the water is clear, it is done a little different from the regular Manta Dive. I would rate it in the top 5. Anyway to cut a long story short it was off the chart even with no Mantas. Incredible fish life, great hard coral formations, colorful soft corals, in a wild setting of rocks and boulders and swim through channels. Just amazing.



Then we sailed for mantas, up from South to North Komodo and we hit the jackpot on our manta spot for this season! Everyone got to see them on the last day of 2014. New Year's Eve was next and the tides were right, so we celebrated on a small white sand spit, just twice the size of the Seven Seas. Surrounded by the ocean, no vegetation, just white sand and water. At dark we let the fireworks fly and let me tell you the fireworks available in Indonesia are sensational. By 10 that night we were all asleep knowing that the New Year had already started back home.

All was quiet on New Year's Day until we got to the village. It was the last day of the trip. First we climbed Strawberry Rock and had a swim before lunch. Then we set out with the kids to the village of Menjangan near Flores to experience how most kids in Indonesia live. We donated a big bag of kids clothing, balls, games, etc. in true Christmas spirit. And as we had eight enthusiastic pirate boys ready for some action, the village kids were challenged to a game of soccer. The challenge was accepted and we had a game on our hands.



The village square was covered by drying sardines and had to be cleared for the great match. The Barefoot Pirates kicked off and we had a big crowd gathering on the sidelines. It was neck and neck for quite some time, until after some great teamwork the Pirates scored the first goal by Daniel Heighes. The locals came back hard and scored the next goal to even things up at one all. The crowd cheered and the Pirates knew they were going to have to fight hard to win.



It was neck and neck again and after a few close misses the locals scored a second goal to win the match. The teams shook hands and the Pirates gave the ball to the winning team. A great time was had by all and it was back to the ship. A farewell dinner and a big thanks to the crew were followed by a big fire on the beach with songs by the crew. A fitting end to another successful family trip on the Seven Seas.

Mark Heighes  
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