

WAKATOBI AND BEYOND!!!!

I've been trying to put into words all my thoughts about this spectacular vacation and I just keep coming up short. It was just too amazing to be able to describe the things we saw.

If you don't already know, Wakatobi Resort is on the small island of Onemobaa located in the "heart of an Indonesian archipelago boasting the world's most pristine and prolific tropical reefs." The resort is fairly small, just 25 bungalows accommodating 50 people. There are no cars on the island, no cell service, no T.V. in the rooms. Our group filled half the resort. The staff was very accommodating, asking daily if we were happy, did we need anything, they brought me delicious vegetarian special meals every time I set foot in the dining room. The weather was perfect, the group consisting of scuba divers and snorkelers from Grand Junction, Utah, Canada and Southern California meshed into a big happy family of divers. The sunsets each night were fantastic... a brilliant blaze of fire red and orange disappearing into the ocean. And the diving..... UNBELIEVABLE!

The first dive was a "check out dive." You see, they are very particular about their pristine and prolific reef, and want to keep it that way by making sure all the divers have excellent buoyancy control and diving skills. So the first dive of the vacation, we have to flood and clear a mask, and prove that we can share air from our buddy in the unlikely event that we run out of air. Jay and I waited patiently while our dive master, Erwin checked out the other divers in our group. We were ready to be set free to enjoy the dive and just wanted him to hurry and get to us. As we waited we started gazing around at a depth of about 15 – 20 feet, just enjoying the scenery. The colors in the coral were spectacular. Deep purple fans were everywhere. Feather Dusters of a sensational variety of colors, corals and plant life in shades of pink, more hues of blue than I knew existed, yellow, green, orange corals.... Every imaginable color in every imaginable shade opening into a vast expanse of the most spectacular coral garden I have ever seen. Finally Erwin got to us for our check out. We passed and were set free to dive.

The first dive we saw all the things we had talked about hoping we would see. We wondered if we would see the infamous pigmy seahorse we watched in the DVD. We did. Several of them in fact. We were especially excited to see our first clown fish (Nemo) Through the week we saw them every day, every dive, quite an abundance of Nemos, peeking shyly from the anemone they live in, but the first time was possibly the best, just because it was the first. We saw sea dragons, sea snakes, schools of large bumphead parrot fish, blue ringed eels, lettuce leaf scorpionfish, a team of spotted eagle rays, huge clams, nudibranchs, very strange, large cuddlefish, incredible looking ghost pipefish..... I just can't even list all the amazing, colorful unusual sea creatures we saw. Every day, every dive I saw several species I had never seen before in 20 years of diving. Every day, every dive was better than the last. Because of relatively shallow depths we were able to stay down for at least 70 minutes each dive. I felt like a child looking at the brand new world and seeing something new every day.

The 18 hour flight was really not as bad as I anticipated. We flew Singapore Airlines from Los Angeles to Singapore and then on to Bali 3 days later. The seats were comfortable, larger than most of the planes we fly and reclined enough to sleep. They fed us often and we got free drinks. We spent 3 days in Singapore, a large, modern, cosmopolitan city. The best of Singapore for me was the Botanical Garden, especially the Orchid garden. We really didn't spend enough time there. Then on to Wakatobi for our week of diving.

After Wakatobi, we spent a few days in Bali. This is another place we must return to. Our resort was amazing! Built on a hillside, each room had its own private plunge pool, and was separated by jungle from all other rooms, so you had complete privacy. The view from every room and from each restaurant was a spectacular hillside, covered with lush tropical foliage and water falls. Every where you looked along the pathways of the resort were stone carved Balinese statues, tropical flowers, trees and Hindu temples. A river ran through the valley at the bottom of the resort that was a playground for river rafters. We really did not have enough time to see as much of Bali as we should. We hired a van with a driver to take us around to do some shopping, but I did not personally see the Monkey Jungle or the volcano that some of the others in our group raved about.

Before we left home I had it in my mind that this would be a "once in a lifetime" dive trip, primarily because of the distance we traveled, the long flight and of course it is more expensive than Cozumel or Caribbean islands. I know now that I will go back. I hope to share my Wakatobi experience with more of my friends. Every single person on our trip raved about the entire trip, the amazing dive experience, the top notch resorts we visited and the friendly people. This was certainly the best trip ever! (so far)