

MALDIVES 'MANTA MADNESS' TRIP 2011

We arrived in the Maldives at midday on Monday 10 Oct 11 after a reasonably comfortable 10 hour flight. It was then a short boat ride from the airport at Male to the MV Orion and a friendly welcome from the crew. We then had the rest of the afternoon to settle in to our luxurious and very comfortable cabins.



Day 2 – Leaving Male early the next morning we arrived at Vihamanaa for a check dive at 0730. This was followed by our first exciting dive at Lankan Manta Point, where we see real Mantas, but not many; only 4. Still it was a good start to the holiday and the promise of things to come. Banana reef was a bit of a letdown and not very inspiring with no Mantas, little marine life and poor coral.

Day 3 – Overnight to South Ari atoll. The early morning dive was on a pinnacle known locally as a Thila. The place was teeming; with divers. There were many exotic species mainly from Italy, classified as thong exotica, and Japan, no buoyancy control ho and fin kick coral hi. Large shoals of Blue Striped Snapper and other fish joined the throng. Another Thila followed. After lunch the boat suddenly turned about and raced towards a Whale Shark that has been





sighted nearby. Mad panic as everyone prepared to enter the water at once to snorkel with the Whale Shark. Sadly, two other boats had the same idea and the Whale Shark finds itself surrounded by 60 guests all splashing around like very large bait fish. Un-phased by the commotion the Whale Shark stayed with us for 45 minutes giving many swimmers the opportunity to return to the Dhoni (dive boat) and don scuba equipment before diving with the Whale Shark again. We think this was a 6.5m female known as Ayesha because there is a small nick in her upper

caudal (tail) fin. This was a thrilling experience for all the tourists. It is not every day that you meet something three times your height and as placid as a teddy bear. Now back to the diving.

Day 4 – Dived a pinnacle with a gully to swim through at Broken Rock. Some go snorkelling with 6 Mantas in the shallows after this dive. We then dived on a wreck of a coaster named Kudhima. The current was quite strong, so we tried out our reef hooks, in some cases, on each other. This was followed by another Thila that revealed some grey reef sharks, a turtle sleeping in a cave, pretty anemones and table corals.

The day was rounded off with a barbeque on a beach in North Ari atoll. Excellent barbequed fish and meat, well presented made a great feast. Dawn, Tracy and Nick went swimming and Jim provided the surface cover.

Day 5 – The first dive of the day was on a wreck of a trawler named Fesdu, which has transformed itself into a beautiful artificial reef over a period of 40 years. A wonderful Manta sighting took place above us as

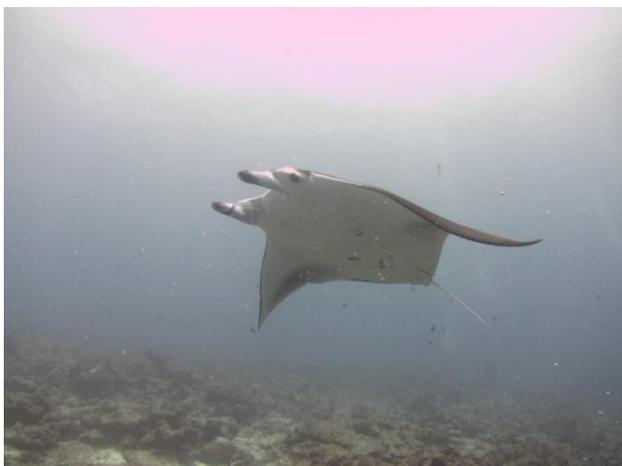


we descended to the wreck. A nearby pinnacle is covered in soft and hard corals lively with fish life at 12-15 metres.

The second dive of the day was on Fish Head reef. Here the Grey Reef sharks gather to have their teeth cleaned and we saw this unusual sight. Imagine a shark grinning and baring his teeth, then shivering head to tail as the cleaner wrasse touches a nerve. A night dive on Mayaa Thila followed; with many other divers; about 60 and probably the most exotic creatures seen throughout the holiday. We saw a Marble Ray and several White Tip sharks hunting on top of the reef. A Moray eel caught and ate a sleeping Parrot fish.

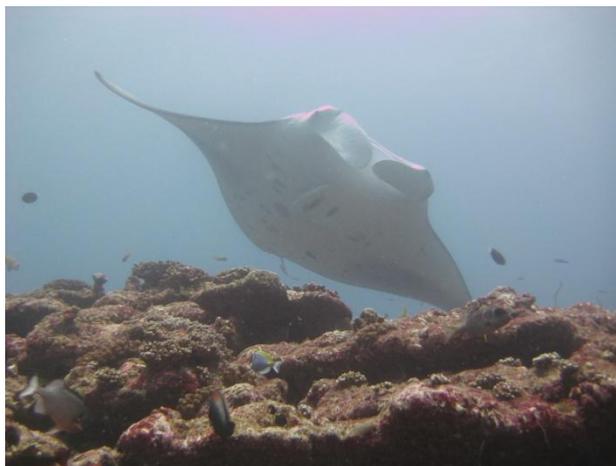


Day 6 – Early morning we dived on a pinnacle with shoals of Fusiliers and Jacks moving around the reef in great ribbons. Mid morning we dived on Gangehi Faru. This was like diving on the moon and very unimpressive. Manta Madness was turning into a non event, with only a few sightings at the beginning of the holiday. The afternoon dive on Masdhoo Madivaru, a ridge of coral rich in fish and home of the Leaf Fish, was more interesting. Here Jim is bitten by a Moray Eel and becomes a candidate for the next available award for interfering with Marine Life.



Day 7 – Our last early morning and we dived into the blue to look for Hammerhead sharks. This was a manic swim through deep blue sea phosphorescing with blue flecks that was rewarded with a brief glimpse of a Hammerhead shark. Others went deeper and stayed longer to get within 10 feet of a group of 3 sharks. The dive ended on the previous

dive site. This was a disappointing dive and one that we did not want to repeat, so we decided to return instead to Lankan Manta Point. Manta Madness at last! What a dive to finish on. There were about 10 Mantas circling around the cleaning station and despite the usual overwhelming number of Japanese and other divers it finally gave us what we came to see.



Day 8 – We said goodbye to some of our party and transferred to Bandos Island, a resort close to Male, for 3 days of rest and recreation. This island was a paradise for snorkelling with marine life including baby Black Tip sharks and turtles. The days were spent sunbathing, swimming and snorkelling. The food was excellent and in the evenings we all gathered at the Sundowners Bar for Happy Hour before dinner.

