

## Borneo 2009 Trip Report



Our holiday to Borneo began with a long haul flight to KL which meant we landed at 07:30am KL time (midnight ish UK time) so a little wearily we got our transport to KL city centre and set about checking into the hotel ready to explore the city. Most people managed to at least get a look at the Petronas Twin Towers and a few people couldn't wait to start diving and so spent the afternoon at the aquarium. Some of the group managed to go up the KL tower too, get attacked by the monkeys around the tower, visit China Town, Little India, various mosques, exotic buildings and the Royal Selangor Club. All in all it was well worth having a day in KL

to break the journey up a bit and there is plenty to see. Steve spent a good portion of it exploring the monorail system to the airport to take back the suitcase that HelenD had mistakenly acquired and retrieving her suitcase.



The next day we left the hotel early to travel back to the airport before having two further flights and a land transfer to reach Mabul (our island destination) by late afternoon, ready for a welcome talk by SMART divers and to split the group between our two boats. The first few nights in Mabul were a little stormy to say the least with thunder crashing so hard that the chalets shook but fortunately during the day the weather was fine and the sea was pretty calm. We dived on Mabul, Simal and Kapalai as well as Sipidan. The diving around the first three islands is pretty different to what we are normally used to with the emphasis being on looking for small critters and strange beasties (in amongst loads of crocodile fish and scorpion fish – and turtles of course!).

So with our nudibranch spotter's anoraks on we all adopted the head down a hole, eyes less than a foot off the reef approach to diving. The different things to see are pretty engrossing and we're now all intrigued as to whether or not all the beasties are on other dive sites around the world – maybe we just never looked hard enough before. One highlight of the diving on Mabul was the opportunity for a bit of voyeurism! At 18:15 every night you can tune in for a bit of Mandarin fish porn!. So we all got into position, cameras at the ready and spent an awful long time taking photos of fish "getting it on" so to speak. A slightly strange way of spending an evening but not something you get to see every day.



We all did at least 2 days of 4 dives on Sipidan too and saw loads of turtles, "white tips, black tips, Galapagos reef sharks..." (oops sorry wrong holiday). There is plenty of bigger life around Sipidan and we were all treated to some amazing scenes of Barracuda, shoaling and balling and also got to do some pretty intense drift dives too! Three of us also got kitted up with an extra tank and dived Turtle Cave. This is a fantastic dive. The start of the dive is through a large cavern, and at the back of the cavern is a tunnel that leads through to the rear cave. In the cave there are loads of turtle skeletons to see, and also the odd fish and shrimp. OK it's not a pretty dive in the reef sense but its nice to have a bit to think about occasionally, and really good experience. The rock formations are pretty interesting too and at the end of the dive once we were back in the cavern we all sat on a rock, turned our lights out and watched the fish shoaling in front of the cavern entrance – very peaceful and relaxing.

On our first trip to Sipidan, Derek being Derek decided to try and start reading his book (while bouncing around on wind over tide). We thought that this would be a great opportunity for light entertainment so Jackanory style we got him to read out loud. With all of us crowding around, and our dive guide, boat boy, videographer and the boat skipper showing much interest, Derek began. Unfortunately the book "I am England" by Patricia Wright begins with the quote; *"The English are very bold, courageous, ardent, and cruel in war, fiery in attack and having little fear of death. They are not vindictive but very inconstant, rash and vainglorious; light and deceiving, and very suspicious, especially of foreigners, whom they despise"*, Van Meteren, 16<sup>th</sup> century Dutch Historian.



Maybe it was one of those times where you needed to be there to appreciate Derek's performance in delivering the lines to our four new Malaysian friends.....but they all seemed as amused as we were. On the last night, after several drinks, Derek was asked what his book was actually about. The response "it's about the village people" didn't really lead to further literary discussion. Maybe he was still in shock after having deciding to take a few days off diving and being left all on his lonesome, one of the local dogs came to his rescue and tried to get all amorous. We also blame Derek for Becci and I spending our "last dive of the holiday" searching for Jason. Jason, left buddyless without Derek was last sighted fighting a dead cornet fish and then went missing under the platform (or oil rig as we liked to call it to wind Jason up, apparently it's correct term is a Barge). Anyway we suspect that Jason was missing



work and after the trauma of the cornet fish and after starting the dive by descending to 3m without his reg in, wanted to go to familiar surroundings.

Anyway Patrick our dive guide eventually found him after some frantic searching – but then realised that Becci and I had gone on a search pattern half way back to main land. Anyway – we decided that that was a good excuse to do another "last dive". Patrick, bless him took us back to the dive site where Jules had inadvertently lost his mask on the previous day and found it for him then we had a fabulous last dive with good viz, turtles, blue spotted rays, a huge puffer fish, some weird nudibranchs that we hadn't previously seen, a decorated spider crab, shoal of squid, the usual crocodile fish (and a juvenile) etc.



By early afternoon, the other boat had settled down in the restaurant with their dive guide (Ralf) and several bottles of local rum and coke. By 18:00 most of the group were still there and Steve was happily taking advantage of Maz's trip to see the orang-utans and was making the most of it. Apparently he was, I quote "as happy as a lamb in deep doo doo".....? All in all we had a fabulous holiday and I hear the four club members who extended their holiday to have a week in the jungle also had a great time. Thanks go to SMART dive resort and especially to our dive guides Patrick, Ralf and David for giving us a fantastic time. Also I think Patrick deserves a special thank you for putting up with a dive group that wanted to do 4 dives a day and weren't happy if the dives didn't last at least 80 minutes. We hope you've recovered now!