

Committed to whale-shark research



Aqua-Firma is to continue to sponsor Marine Megafauna Foundation whale-shark research on Mafia Island in Tanzania, and has planned fund-raising research, filming and photography trips for this November and the next – mid-season for optimum whale-shark sightings.

“For the four years we’ve been running these trips we’ve seen whale sharks on 80% of days we’ve been out,” says Aqua-Firma

Director Ralph Pannell. The highlight of 2016 was a 90-minute swim with a shark over a shallow sand bank. “A school of golden trevally had made it their home, swimming at the mouth, trying to predict its every turn.”

Drs Simon Pierce and Chris Rohner lead the trips and offer advice, including photographic. This year’s event starts on 30 October in Zanzibar or Dar es Salaam and

runs until 7 November. The price is £2260 and includes accommodation, all meals on Mafia, whale-shark outings, talks, photo and film workshops and flights within Tanzania. Add an optional £380 for 10 scuba reef-dives.

Diving add-ons to Zanzibar and Pemba are also available, as are land wildlife safaris.

▶▶ www.aqua-firma.com

Dhigali debut

Euro-Divers Maldives is set to open a new dive-centre at Dhigali Maldives in Raa Atoll at the start of May. It will join its existing centres in North and South Male, Ari and Gaafu Dhaalu atolls. Euro-Divers will also open a Dhigali centre offering other water-sports.

▶▶ www.eurodivers.com

TEC WRECKS IN MALTA, THE INGLE WAY

Jack Ingle Technical Diving’s latest Malta Wreck-Diving expeditions get underway over three separate weeks in May, with WW1 and WW2 vessels lying in the 40-70m range in the leader’s sights.

Examples include the liner *Le*

Polynesian, submarine HMS *Stubborn*, destroyer HMS *Southwold* and the German MTB *Schnellboot*, but there are many other possibilities.

A £690pp charge covers five days’ boat-diving, self-catering

accommodation, group vehicle hire and transfers, air and twin-set or CCR cylinder hire. A deco station with support diver and back-up gas on the line is provided. Flights cost from £180 extra.

▶▶ jack@jackingle.co.uk

New option in Manado



Tour operator Regaldive has added Mercure Manado Tateli Beach Resort to its Indonesia portfolio, with diving provided by Eco Divers, already well-known in the Manado and Lembah areas of North Sulawesi.

The resort, six miles from the town of Manado, has its own beach and marina and a variety of room options, and is a half-hour boat-ride away

from the spectacular wall and drift dives of the Bunaken marine park (see feature in this issue).

The usual package price is from £1556pp for seven nights’ twin share with full board, flights and transfers. However, during Regaldive’s continuing “Winter Sale” period the price is reduced by 10%, so book soon if you wish to get it from £1399pp.

▶▶ www.regaldive.co.uk



BLUES SOLO

Ultimate Diving is offering a new “Solo Divers” trip to the Azores to dive with blue sharks at the start of September. The sites are on the reefs around Faial and Pico Islands, but also on the agenda are the banks of Condor and Princess Alice for diving with manta rays and other pelagics.

The trip lasts from 1-9 September with flights to and from Faial with TAP Air Portugal, including an overnight in Lisbon, Portugal. The package costs £1480pp.

▶▶ www.ultimatediving.co.uk

Malaysian volunteering

Biosphere Expeditions has an extended scuba trip to the Malaysian island of Tioman lined up this year. Volunteers, who must already be qualified divers, work with a small group from a liveaboard yacht, helping a local researcher to study and protect the marine park’s coral reefs.

You would be diving two to four times a day (can’t be bad), and training as a Reef Check EcoDiver is included. The eight-day trip, which starts on 15 August, costs £1640, excluding flights.

▶▶ www.biosphere-expeditions.org

Best of Solomons

If you’ve read about diving in the Solomon Islands from the *Bilikiki* (*Hooked on the Islands*, January), you might care to know that Texas-based Island Scuba is running a trip there from 27 June to 11 July.

It will take in the famed WW2 site Guadalcanal and others such as Mary’s Place, various war wrecks, Leru Cut, Mirror Pond and the remote Russell Islands. The trip is hosted by underwater film-maker and explorer Nancy McGee and photographer Sue Drafahl, and costs US \$7280pp (sharing a cabin).

▶▶ www.islandtimescuba.com

Yap’s 30% offers

Manta Ray Resort & Yap Divers on the Pacific island of Yap are offering 30% off special deals throughout 2017 to mark their 30 years in business.

Any seven-night (or longer) dive package gets three free room nights, so divers on two-week packages get six nights free. Stay three weeks for the price of two! suggest the hosts. Groups of 10 or more paying divers get three free places too.

For an idea of standard rates, the 7/10 Diver deal (seven nights’ stay with 10 dives) costs US \$1419.

▶▶ www.mantaray.com

Winter quarters

A “winter sale” is offering up to 25% off trips on blue o two liveaboards. Divers can save up to £338 on Red Sea fleet bookings, including flights to Hurghada, on departures up to June.

Potential savings are bigger on Maldives vessels *blue Voyager* and *Sea Spirit* – up to £624 – again applicable on trips up to June, including the Project Shark: Maldives itinerary hosted by expert Elke Bojanowski.

▶▶ www.blueotwo.com



Looks colourful...

Cocoon Maldives is the latest 5* resort to try to tempt UK divers. The large island of Ookolhufinolu lies in Lhaviyani atoll, a 30-minute seaplane flight from Male.

The resort claims to have ready access to 50 dive-sites, including

the Shipyard, which has two shipwrecks at one site, and Kuredhoo Express, where sharks, mantas and barracuda might just be willing to co-operate.

The resort features 150 beach

or over-water villas, three restaurants, two bars, spa and gym and, of course, a dive-centre.

A beachside room with breakfast for two costs from US \$465 a night.

▶▶ www.cocoonmaldives.com

Dalaman sets its sights on divers



Dalaman on the south-western Aegean coast of Turkey boasts white-sand beaches and clear waters (20-40m vis). The Hilton Dalaman Sarigerme Resort & Spa, nine miles from the airport, has its own private beach and claims to offer colourful reefs, marine life including turtles, barracuda, rays and grouper, ancient shipwrecks and underwater ruins and caverns, swim-throughs and pinnacles, no less!

Down the coast at Ölüdeniz large amphoras and a well-preserved shipwreck are promised. The hotel says it can organise diving and courses for all abilities, and rooms cost from £75pp per night – though book before the end of February and you’ll get 30% off (£52.50 a room).

▶▶ www.hiltondalaman.com

SITTING PRETTY IN RAJA AMPAT

Raja Ampat Biodiversity Eco Resort is located in the heart of that well-known diving treasure-house, eastern Indonesia. Set in the Dampier Strait, it claims to make reaching the main dive-sites easy. And you will certainly be avoiding the crowds because this all-solar-powered boutique resort takes no more than 14 guests.

A sample of a price package aimed at solo travellers is a seven-night stay in a budget room with two dives a day for US \$1385. A couple sharing might choose a “superior cottage” over the same period with two dives a day for \$1805pp.

▶▶ www.rajaampatbiodiversity.com

