

Ron Hunter's Dive Expeditions

Maldives liveaboard tours.

By Ron Hunter of Dive Forster at Fisherman's Wharf

In October and November 2010, two groups of eighteen divers travelled to the Maldives for two fortnight long liveaboard trips. Most of the groups were from Australia with an additional four of our contingent coming from the UK and Malaysia.

Our home for each of these two weeks was the M.V. "Manta Cruise", a superb, four-deck 34 metre long luxury liveaboard.

Flying via Singapore we were met at the airport at Male by Loic and Cynthia, our two AbyssWorld cruise directors and dive guides. After the normal immigration formalities we were taken directly from the airport by doni, a traditional Maldivian passenger transfer boat, to where the "Manta Cruise" was moored. And after welcoming drinks we gratefully retired to our air-conditioned cabins for some well deserved sleep after the flights; who said air travel was fun?

For each group, over the next twelve days we were to enjoy what I believe is some of the best diving I have ever experienced.

There are over ninety liveaboard boats in the Maldives, ranging from crazy luxury craft complete with prayer, karaoke and games rooms at \$25,000 per person per week, to aging non air-conditioned vessels that only budget minded surfers would ever consider.

What sets the "Manta Cruise" out as the obvious choice for our tours is the quality of not only the vessel itself but the crew, and in particular our AbyssWorld guides, Loic and Cynthia. They are with doubt the most professional, committed and knowledgeable dive guides I have ever had the pleasure to dive with.

Too often I have experienced dive guides who's main focus has been to photograph and /or video the divers in order that they can sell them a "souvenir" DVD of their trip. This is certainly not the case with the AbyssWorld guides, with a "no cameras" policy for their guides, this ensures that the visiting divers are the only focus, their enjoyment, the photographic opportunities and some elusive critters found and pointed out and above all their safety.

Diving in the Maldives is very tide affected, with over 3,000 metres of ocean surrounding the atolls. This massive volume of water "squeezes" over the shallow reef and through the ocean channels into the atolls with each change of tide. Knowledge of these tidal movements and their effects is critical in planning the diving here. Loic and Cynthia were constantly checking and consulting tide charts. And before every dive Loic and at times Cynthia as well would "bounce" the dive sites or the channel leading to the site, checking on the strength, and direction of the tidal flow; sometimes they would do two or three "bounces" to ensure that not only were we

dropped in the correct spot to be able to dive any particular reef, but to also check on the visibility and in particular the safety of the dive.

Loic and Cynthia's intimate knowledge of the dive sites, with having logged literally thousands of dives here, allowed us to experience diving that I believe is just not available on any of the other liveboards in the Maldives.

We were richly rewarded for their untiring efforts, our thirty-six very experienced diver travellers all left wishing for more.

The highlight of the diving for me was in Hanifaru Lagoon at Baa Atoll and the massed flights of Manta Rays there, these few photos that are here tell part of the story; it is really a bit of a mind overload being in the midst of a "cyclone feed" of over sixty Manta Rays.

We did, because of an unusual early shift in the monsoon winds, actually miss the really big aggregation of Manta Rays at Hanifaru Lagoon, for only three days before we arrived at the Lagoon, there were over three-hundred Manta Rays in residence in Hanifaru, and with this Lagoon being around the size of a football field this would have been real "Manta Magic".

We are of course returning to the Maldives and the "Manta Cruise" in 2011 for more of this brilliant diving.

Tour fact file for Maldives 2011:

- ✓ Flying Singapore Airlines, depart Sydney, Brisbane or Melbourne 22nd October 2011
- ✓ Return 5th November
- ✓ Thirteen days, twelve nights onboard M.V. "Manta Cruise"
- ✓ All meals included whilst onboard
- ✓ Up to thirty Scuba dives including three night dives
- ✓ AbyssWorld dive guides
- ✓ World renowned shark expert tour leader from Australia
- ✓ Twin-share, air-conditioned cabins with ensuite
- ✓ Cost ex: Male, Maldives \$US 4000

For detailed itinerary and more information visit www.diveforster.com.au

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