

Subject: Utila Trip Report

Our trip to Laguna Beach Resort started out with Friday night (9/17) spent in the Newark Hilton, with secure parking and shuttle service to the airport. We left for the airport a little early Saturday due to it being peak travel time. The flight was comfortable and relaxing, 4.5 hour direct flight, arriving on the Honduran mainland around noon. We were greeted by a resort representative, secured our baggage and boarding pass for the charter flight, grabbed a snack, and took off for Utila just after 2:00 pm.

We were welcomed at the Utila airfield by the Laguna Beach Resort Manager, shuttled via bus and truck to a private dock, then took a short boat ride through the lagoon to the resort. At the “Resort” the check in process was simple; we took a short tour of the resort, enjoyed a complimentary beverage, and then headed to the room to unpack. The resort is a traditional Caribbean style with sand and palm trees everywhere. Bungalows are simple, clean, inviting, each with their own dock into the mangrove lagoon.

Dive Shop/Staff

The Dive Shop is conveniently located behind the restaurant and next to the boat dock. The shop provides weights, tanks, and great information on local diving and whale shark encounters. They can also provide any other dive gear that maybe needed (in some cases for a fee). The Gear Room allows for good air flow, gear storage by room number, and is secured nightly. Dive Boats are Newton Series, well maintained with ample space. Equipped with head and standard Coast Guard approved equipment.

Dive staff was outstanding. The Dive Master and Captain catered to our every need. They are committed to assemble your gear for you, unless you choose to do your own. Boat trips were at a max, 40 minutes, which took us around to the north side of the island. Typically, we went to the further site in the morning and worked our way back to the resort. Consistent water temperatures of 87 °F. Dive master guided each dive allowing divers to adjust their profile to meet their individual’s desires. Those who wish to explore the depths or go off on their own are welcome to do so; likewise, those who prefer to stay shallow are also accommodated. Shore diving and optional 4th dive drop off dives are also available. The day is planned for two tank boat dives in the morning, in for lunch around noon-ish, back out for a single tank dive around 2 pm with the option for a drop off dive on the house reef on the return trip. On each dive site, we encountered the typical Caribbean marine critters including blue tang, flounders and lobsters. We also found numerous lionfish, including a juvenile, a six-foot rough tail stingray, 4 or five spotted eagle rays, several hawksbill turtles, and some nurse sharks. The Captain stayed in communication with other dive boats and scanned the horizon for other opportunities to encounter larger marine life – WHALE SHARKS! During the second day of diving while en-route to the second morning dive site we changed course when the captain spotted the telltale

signs of a whale shark. Within 10 minutes the captain had us alongside a 30' majestic whale shark. Once the sighting was confirmed, divers were offered a chance to snorkel with the whale shark and within a minute we were ready to go on the captain's command. After a very brief swim from the boat, we were side by side with the whale shark. Oh yeah, we did that four times!

Cost of Room - \$1465

Airfare - \$500

10' from a 30' Whale Shark – PRICELESS

If that was not enough excitement on day 3, we repeated the process for a snorkel with about a fifty dolphins!

Food

Food was typical Caribbean cuisine served in a buffet style. Breakfast included an egg dish, side of bacon, ham or spicy sausage bites, cereals and grains. Lunch and Dinner meals consisted of an entrée/protein, potato/rice, veggie, usually soup and salad. Dinner always included a sweet treat. Beverages included water, iced tea, coffee, and hot tea. Soft drinks and adult beverages available at comparable US prices.

Nightlife/Extras

Hey, this is a Caribbean island, after four dives in a day, a full belly, nightlife consisted of curling up in a comfortable chair with a beverage, and discussing the days diving as you look out at the moonlit water. Satellite TV, a pool table, and a small library are also located in the main building. Don't forget to take a dip in the elevated fresh water pool. Other activities, which we did not have time to partake in, include use of onsite kayaks, off site horseback riding all included in the package. Off-site tours, deep sea fishing, quad touring, and room massages also available at a slight extra charge.

While normally on Friday night there is a large BBQ by the pool, Tropical Storm Matthew prohibited the event on this trip. The Resort Owner informed us of the storm and offered us options. Due to the impending storm, we left the resort Friday afternoon instead of Saturday morning. The owner provided, at his expense, accommodations on the mainland near the airport, it was a nice hotel and they took good care of us. While we were sad to leave the island early, we were glad for the owner's sincere concern for our safety and welfare. The return flight was the incoming flight in reverse. Upon arrival at the airport, we checked our bags, and waited for our return flight, which was relaxed, 4 hours direct to Newark.