

Our diverse band of travelers (27 in all), came from all over the country, to gather in Newark for our trip to Laguna Beach Resort on Utila; with ½ spending Friday night (2/4/11) at the Newark Hilton, with secure parking and shuttle service to the airport. Others traveled into meet us at the airport in the morning.

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, who assisted us in securing our baggage and preparing for the 1st group (14) to take the charter flight to Utila. Once the 1st group headed out, the 2nd group grabbed a snack and a beverage and waited for our flight at 4:00pm.

Both groups were welcomed at the Utila airfield by the Laguna Beach Resort Manager, shuttled via bus and truck to a private dock, and then took a short boat ride 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 staff was outstanding. The Dive Masters (Adam and Andrew) and Captains (Wagner and Kerri) catered to our every need. 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 81 °F made each dip refreshing to the 85° to 90° days. Dive masters guided each dive allowing divers to adjust their profile to meet their individual 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 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 2:30 pm.

Because we were such a large group, we divided into 2 boats, with boat 1 being comprised of Nitrox divers and divers completing classes. During the trip we certified three new Nitrox Divers (Amanda, Kevin, and Mary) and 2 Advanced Divers (Jamie and Jeromy). Additionally, we had 4 divers (Jason, John, Kevin, and Mary) taking their Master Scuba Diver Course. While we only completed 80% of their dives on the trip, the students did an outstanding job, reserving the last dives for a future date at Dutch Springs.

To put it simply, there was a lot of diving available and some of the “fish” took advantage of that, several of whom logged 23 dives for the trip, including a few with 5 dives in a day, thanks to a 5am sunrise dive! The afternoon drop off dive on the house reef became a rite of passage, with almost all of the divers participating at least once. The final drop off dive started well beyond the resort and provided the “fish” with a great view of sea turtles and lion fish in an area rarely dove by others.

We had Andrzej from Utila Center for Marine Ecology come and give a lecture, lead 2 lion fish hunts and then teach us how to clean and prepare the fish for fresh ceviche. Then then the Dive masters in our group were permitted to continue hunting lion fish for the rest of the trip. The lion fish hunt was conducted to help remove the invasive fish from the reef area. As part of the hunt, we fed the lion fish to native species such as morays and trigger fish. In all 30 lion fish we removed from the environment.

On our last dive day, we did find a whale shark! While Boat 1 never actually caught up to the Shark, Boat 2 did have a sighting, but sadly it was not long enough to allow for any snorkeling with the majestic fish. Both boats however did have an encounter with a pod of dolphins, with Boat 1 getting a decent amount of snorkeling in with the pod.

As always, a dive trip is not complete without food, sun, and touring. On several occasions’ members of the group traveled by boat to town to participate in the night life, shop, and just wander around the

streets of Utila. The weather was great all week, with sunshine and a slight breeze. Sadly, the trip came to an end Saturday morning with Mother Nature providing tears for our departure in the form of showers as we departed the island for our journey home.

In all the group had many special events, some passed milestones of 100 dives, others celebrated birthdays, and first dives in the ocean. Plans are in the works for the 2012 trip, and perhaps even some short trips over the summer to the coast. Stay tuned for more...