

Guam Kayak Diving

by Tim Rock & Elaine Kwok

I have just finished a book about diving in Hawaii with a guy named David Fleetham as my co-author. Dave is a great photographer and one thing he does off his home waters of Maui is go kayak diving. On Guam, I had always had a boat or boat access so never really thought about trying it until COVID and its many restrictions hit our island.

We were still allowed to do some outdoor activities like individual water sports (swimming, snorkeling, diving with a spouse or roomie) on Guam during our lockdown. This was great as the small but scenic island of Guam in Western Micronesia is blessed with one of the world's richest coral reef marine environments. It thrives with more than 1000 fish species and over 400 kinds of hard and soft corals, 1,600 mollusk species and a dozen different marine mammals.

The betterment of Guam's diverse underwater world has been the thrust behind a series of nature preserves set up around the island in the last decade. These areas allow breeding stocks to prosper to make more fish and allow corals to grow without stress. In a far-sighted move, the island was studied and some small, but very important, areas were set aside to help replenish the reefs. The most popular sites and also my personal favorites are Piti Bay and Tumon Bay.

Then a lightbulb went off. My friend Satoru Wada owns a place called The Tropical Beach House Guam. It is in front of the Westin Hotel right on the beach and it has options for water fun. He was able to stay open and accommodate flight crews

staying at the hotel. The crew members couldn't wander anywhere away from hotel grounds on their layovers, but they could swim and dive in front of the facility. Thus, the kayak diving was still in operation while all the other boat diving options on island were shut down.

Many people launch SUPs from inner Tumon and nearby Gun Beach. Both are part of the diverse Tumon Bay Marine Preserve. These little Two-mile protected stretches of west coast bays are amazingly rich in diversity. Just within them are more than 200 fish species and 50 or more corals. To put it in perspective, this is basically more than double any Caribbean destination. The SUP folks head out over the reefs to try to see sea turtles and mantas. But for diving, SUPs don't cut it. Kayaks do. So I decided to give this a try. I called Wada-san and he said come on down. We got a kayak all geared up and my camera gear secured. There were others who wanted to join in. So it would be a fun day on the sea and a new trick for this old dog.

There is a choice of a single or double kayak. If the dive bunch is a small group of, say, four divers, one kayak will carry tanks and BCs and weights. But you can also be a one-person band and load your kayak up. Ocean kayaks can easily carry a single scuba set-up. My friend has submerged moorings in four places outside the reef in about 30 feet (9m) of water. From there you can go deeper or shallow. He has found some places that turtles seem to love so that's why I like going out with him as he knows where they like to sleep and swim. On



my first trip, we saw 10 turtles on one dive, which is very good for Guam.

Some people are in it just for the dive and paddle out over the reef flats and past the dropoff as fast as they can. But I like the whole experience. Pushing off from the beach and starting in to the sound of the lap of the waves on the bow and



the gentle splash of a paddle is far different from your typical dive boat experience. I love the feeling of gliding over the clear, inner bay waters.

Wada-san or his guide will normally paddle out along a lush, jungled limestone cliff finger near the bay's end. In these shallows, you can see juvenile eagle rays, baby blacktip sharks and small fish schools. There

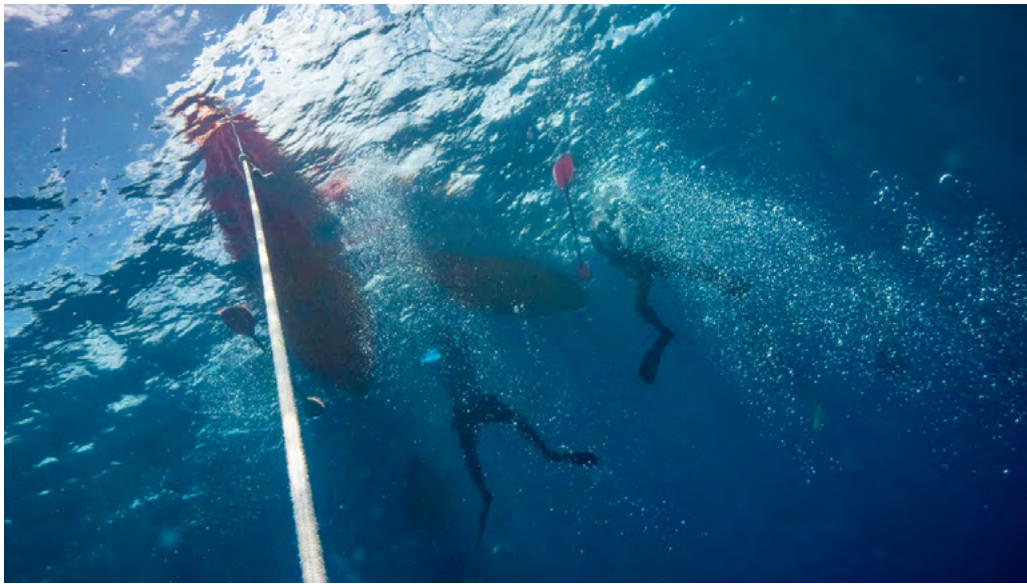
are many types of puffers in here and also marauding shoals of convict tangs. Then you head out a sandy pass and it is a short paddle over the barrier reef to open ocean and to the various dive sites.

People who are not divers often just go out and snorkel too, having the assurance of a moored kayak nearby. I regularly snorkel out there too. You never know what will swim

by. Using a small vessel speeds things up coming and going but there is no rush. There is a certain serenity of a soothing paddle on the Pacific.

The dropoff doesn't start until about 60-70 feet (18-22m), so there's

lots to see along the northern end of the preserve. The terrain is mainly castle corals and some Medusa-like pillars. There are also soft corals and some anemone colonies. Macro buffs can check for nudibranchs, spotted



blennies, hard coral gobies and colorful Christmas tree worms. If we go south from the cut the chance to see mantas and blacktip and whitetip sharks improves. There is one spot named Turtle Town that normally lives up to its named with green sea turtles and the occasional hawksbill.

Plus, we have four or five types of schooling fish like striped surgeons, goatfish and snubnose surgeons and lots of roaming herbivores. People also do this kayak exploration in the Piti marine preserve farther south and occasionally in Guam's southern Agat Bay. But Tumon is really the main spot.

Only after storms when surf is high is it not safe to venture out by kayak. Then nobody does anything anyway. While COVID sucked in

many ways, we learned to work around it in Guam with some great snorkeling trips and fun kayak dives. If you get the chance at your next destination, I recommend it for a fun time and a new experience.

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