

Diving in the normal world

I am a very lucky traveller because most of my trips are booked through trusted agents like Divequest or they are journalist trips where the resort pamper me with good service.

I came back to earth (ha, ha) with a real bump this August however when, at the last minute, I decided to join an American friend of mine who had booked a week in the Red Sea on The Blue Pearl organised by London based travel agents Diving World.

On the whole the trip was fine from my point of view but it became obvious that two different groups were on board. One had booked from Thursday to Thursday whilst we were from Friday to Friday. The result was that we had to return to port a day early resulting in the loss of virtually a full days diving. Now by my reckoning that's a loss of 16% and both the Blue Pearl and Diving World must have known that they were going to short change our group all along.

To me it wasn't really that big a deal but another couple in our group had paid extra for the luxury top deck cabin only to find their air conditioning wasn't working and they had to sleep on deck after everybody had retired following their evening's revelling on the top deck. Another

couple had booked on an entirely different liveaboard (not through Diving World, I hasten to add) and were bounced onto ours at the last minute.

Mobile telephone communication was made during the trip between Diving World and the top deck cabin couple and I was astounded to be told by them that Diving World had said that Mr Rowlands and Diving World have "previous history" and that he will no longer be welcome to travel with us in the future.

When I picked up my jaw from the diving deck I faintly remembered what the "previous history" was but I can't really remember the full detail because it was well over 10 years ago. If my recollection is right I supplied underwater photos to Diving World for them to use in their brochure and was either never paid or maybe was paid, under duress, after some threatening letters.

For a nanosecond I was worried that my underwater photography career would be terminally curtailed. Unable to book through Diving World. Unable to access the quality diving and liveaboards they can provide me access to.

And then I thought "Phew. Based

on my experiences on this trip, thank heavens for that".

Hurricane Ivan

There was a time in my diving career when I was very unlucky.

Back in the early 80's my first big overseas trip was to Baja on a liveaboard for a week but a hurricane arrived the day after I did so we spent most of the time being battered in port watching Conan the Barbarian over and over again.

Next year I won a prize in an underwater photo competition for a week in the British Virgin Islands and, you've guessed it, the hurricane flew in a couple of days after I did. My diving buddy and I were into tennis at the time and we kept the locals amused by playing on puddle drenched courts trying to serve into the wind only to have Hurricane Hugo return our serves without us having to play a stroke. I also remember we were mildly inconvenienced by a power failure which meant having to have breakfast by candle light cooked on a portable gas heater.

New Zealand was next. Twice. A hurricane both times. For me that's a very long way to go and get my hair

ruffled.

I am obviously recounting my misfortunes because of the terrible havoc Hurricane Ivan has wreaked in the Caribbean but, having read some first hand accounts of the terrifying time many people had and the damage they suffered, I now realise that my experiences were pathetically pale in comparison.

From a diving point of view the damage suffered in Cayman has hit home the most and I hope they will be able to rebuild their properties and businesses as soon as possible.

With every disaster comes a tourist drought but I hope UwP readers will not succumb to negative decisions when booking your next photo trip and I, for one, want to lead by example and say that I intend to book a trip as a farepaying tourist and go for a week's underwater photography in Cayman. Maybe I'll see you there.

Apologies for any spelling mistakes

The past few issues of UwP have been proofread by my good friend Pat Morrissey but unfortunately he is on holiday away from an internet connection for this issue so I apologize for any spelling mistakes in this issue.

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