

Mantas and More at Yap Foto Fest

by James Michael

The First Annual Yap Digital Foto Fest hosted by the Manta Ray Bay Hotel has been deemed a success as students turned out some stunning shots of manta rays, mandarinfish and some special reef creatures during the week long event. Tim Rock, Lonely Planet author/photographer of many books on Micronesia, Mike Veitch, head of Manta Visions at Yap Divers, Chris Bangs, Guam-based pro and assistant to Wyland and Bill Acker, Yap's diving pioneer, were on the teaching staff. Some of Yap's best guides also joined the group to find special creatures and the best conditions.

The eager students from such locales as the US, Guam and Europe participated in a week's worth of both close-up and wide angle adventures in the channels, on the reefs and along the walls of the island. This brought divers face-to-face with a number of curious manta rays. Reef sharks, sleeping crocodilefish, schools of bigeye jacks and barracudas and plenty of small critters became the focus of the underwater shooters.

The experience level of the students ranged from several years of UW photography to "first time out of the box" with a camera and housing! There was a good range of equipment as well, from big DSLR twin strobe monstrosities to a couple of nice point-and-shoot style cameras.

The pros set up in the new Manta Ray conference room to give daily lectures about photography principles in the underwater world, workflow, use of Photoshop editing, advanced





techniques and one-on-one critiques.

The highlight of the week was the great slideshow presentation on Manta Ray's ship cum pub. In order to show off in style, the staff put up the giant video screen (16 x 10 feet) on the mast of the Mnuw ship restaurant and projected the slide show in grand fashion. People watched the results of the students in the open air theater under the stars while sipping suds from the ship brew pub.

All in all the First Annual Foto Festival was a grand success and another will be hosted next year in sunny Yap in June 2007. The Pacific pros are also traveling to Bali in October 2006 and Puerto Galera in 2007. For more details about the events please visit the Shoot Underwater website at www.shootunderwater.com.

James Michael

www.shootunderwater.com