

Whale sharks

by Arturo de Frias

It was 1am and I was peacefully sleeping in my cabin when somebody started to violently bang on my door. Normally, I would have felt either very scared (are we sinking?) or very annoyed, but I jumped from my bed with a big smile on my face. Poor fellow, you might think... too much nitrogen over the years ended up having an irreversible impact on his perception of reality... But there was a much nicer explanation for the big smile on the my face... Because the guy banging on my door was our divemaster, and he was shouting "Whale Shark!, Whale Shark!".

I recently spent one week diving in the Southern atolls of Maldives, from Male to Thaa Atoll, passing through Vaavu and Meemu Atolls. Maldives needs no introduction as one of the top diving spots in the world, and my expectations were suitably high - I hoped to see many sharks, I hoped to see Giant Mantas... and of course I hoped to meet Mr. Big.

The Southern Atolls seemed an ideal destination for me; as I normally prefer to dive "off the beaten current", I felt much more comfortable in the far south vs. the more popular central parts of the archipelago, which are now receiving a very high intensity of visitors. I had also heard that in places like Hanifaru, which used to be magnets for megafauna in which meeting a number of large pelagics was almost guaranteed, now it is increasingly difficult to enjoy large encounters.

I went with Maldives Scuba Tours Ltd, onboard the MV Sea Queen. With two dive masters that I thought were absolutely world class: Lisa and



Nikon D7000, Tokina 10-17mm, Ikelite housing, natural light, F3.5 at 1/50, ISO 1000

Dave.

Well, I have to say, my high expectations were not only met, but amply exceeded... we saw sharks by the hundreds, particularly at places such as Viligili kandu, one of the most famous dives of Huvadhoo Atoll. We also saw Giant Mantas on at least three occasions, and last, but by no means least, we met Mr. Big. In fact, we met not only one, but five different Mr. Big, during two unbelievable nights. To these encounters I would like to dedicate

Maldives Scuba Tours MV Sea Queen

