

The amazing Galapagos Islands

By Ken Riddick

Six hundred miles off the Pacific coast of Ecuador a unique confluence of ocean currents, volcanism and wildlife create a dive trip like none other. Considered by many to be the best diving in the world, it certainly is among the most rigorous and unique.

My long-time dive buddy, Brad Reynolds, and I dove the archipelago during eight days aboard the 105-foot live-aboard dive yacht Deep Blue. An unforgettable experience.



We encountered dozens upon dozens of four different species of sharks, we wore ourselves out fighting sloppy seas and extreme currents, we made a few new friends. We had a ball.

All the hyperbole about these islands, well, isn't.

It wasn't all perfect. The notoriously fickle national park changed our itinerary at the last moment and we were not allowed to see the Darwin Science Center. And Brad was forced to change his return flight plans. The seas were often rough and several travelers were sick part of the time. But we had plenty of time at the best dive spots, including remote Darwin and Wolf Islands and we managed a couple of land excursions so that we could experience some of the topside beauty of this place, too.

All of our research told us that this was no ordinary dive trip. We learned that the water would be relatively cold, the currents strong and often dangerous, and the visibility no better than some lakes. It was not a trip for beginners. But the divemasters take pretty solid precautions, including outfitting the divers with safety sausages, very loud alerts and even radio transmitters in the extreme case that a diver might be swept out into the endless Pacific.

The Deep Blue handled 16 divers very comfortably, the food was plentiful and delicious. Everything but the beer was included in the price, including the airfare from Guayaquil to San Cristobal Island. And the beer was cheap.

The service was top notch: hot showers followed by hot towels awaiting us after each dive. Then a snack and fresh juice. And the crew handled most of our gear so we weren't lugging it all over the boat.

The pre-dive briefings were well informed and complete. We always knew what conditions to expect and how best to be prepared for each dive.

The trip started by flying to Guayaquil, Ecuador. We spent two nights there to assure that if our checked dive and photography equipment missed one of our connections, it would arrive before we had to board the boat, after which there would be no turning back. Many of the islands are remote and uninhabited. It would be essential that we had everything we needed on board.

We all had to do a "check out" dive at the mooring at Wreck Bay to tune our buoyancy and test our skills before we embarked. Then, it was off to far reaches of the archipelago and some experiences that will carry us into old age.