

Hurghada Red Sea December 2006

Report by Tony and Ryan Curtis

On the 1st of December 2006 Ryan and I set off from a wet Swindon train station at 5am on route to Gatwick, for a week of diving in Hurghada. Ryan having just completed his junior open water course with White Horse Diving. Quite an eventful journey because as I got off the train at Reading to await the connection for Gatwick a cold draught was felt in the nether regions. My only pair of jeans I had with me had decided they didn't want to go to Egypt and a zip failure was discovered. Never mind pull down the sweatshirt no-one will notice!

Arriving at Gatwick with 3 hours to check in the usual chaos was found with queues snaking in all directions in the check in lounge. Eventually finding the right queue for our Thomas Cook flight we checked in. Time to go shopping for a new pair of jeans and other duty free essentials. Next got the vote for the jeans and some spirits were purchased. Time to board the flight and we took our seats in row 26 as was stated in our boarding cards. As we sat awaiting take off time another couple arrived stating they had the same seats in row 26. To our horror it seemed at check in we had been booked on a flight to Morocco, and therefore our baggage was also on route to North Africa or that was our first thought. It seemed that the check in clerk had printed the wrong boarding cards and in fact we were in row 16 and the cabin crew had our correct boarding cards. Still there was the thought that as the Thomas Cook flight to Morocco took off "was our luggage on the right flight?" The cabin crew assured us it was and it was very nice to have complimentary drinks on the flight to Egypt in relation to the stress caused. The flight was uneventful from there on arriving at Hurghada 4 hours after take off or thereabouts. Then for the fun of clearing Egyptian immigration and the usual scrum for visas. Once through immigration and then the wait for the luggage. Was it in Egypt or Morocco? Thankfully two suit cases rolled up the belt and we were sorted.

Meeting our Regal rep and a short walk to the transfer coach was the next step. We had opted to stay at The Sultan Beach Resort on a bed and breakfast tariff, with diving supplied on a buy one get one free option at Divers Lodge.

Thirty minutes or so later we arrived at our hotel and discovered we were the only Brits there. The Hotel seemed ok and the room adequate for our needs. The rep had told us we were better off using a couple of local restaurants near by than eating in the hotel. This was good advice and we favoured the closest one The Big Brothers across the street from the hotel.

Day one Saturday

We were picked up at 8am the time it would be every day to travel the 5 minutes by local taxi to the Dive centre which operated out of the Intercontinental Hotel. Alaa, one of the instructors at the dive centre, would do this run every day with us.

At the dive centre, which was not very busy, we were allocated lockers for our kit and briefed on the week ahead. It seemed the TDI Nitrox course I had arranged to start today was put off 'till Monday due to the instructor due to take it not being available. We were shown around our Dive boat "TINY" and set off for our first days diving. There were a few other divers on the boat doing a technical course but the boat was by no way crowded. This was a check out dive and the first site was a reef called ABU RAMADA SOUTH, This is named after a nearby island and is south

of the Gifton national park. We did a 47 minute dive to a maximum depth of 12 metres. The dive site abounds with amazing flora and fauna and has the wreck of a Safari Boat on a 5 metre shelf where the safety stop at the end of the dive is taken There is a sand eel garden on the edge of the site and a large Moray eel was at home during the dive.

Food was eaten on the boat and I must say the quality was the best during or stay.

Dive two was SHAAB ESHTA a dive site near Magawish island, made up of 2 ergs connected by a shallow channel and a figure of 8 is swam around the site. There is an area of sea grass nearby and Blue Spotted rays where seen. This was a rich reef with yellow goat fish and lion fish seen. After 45 minutes at 9 metres the dive was completed with Ryan on a high after his first days diving in almost perfect conditions.

In the evening we paid our £1 Egyptian to travel into Hurghada town by bus to be hassled by the traders, or in Ryan's word "I wish they would stop trying to scab us stuff" We ate in a nice kerb side bar watching life unfold around us. We returned to the Hotel and Ryan was in bed by 9 leaving me to check out to entertainment, which didn't improve throughout the week, I think tonight was folk night. Finding out most of my fellow guests were Russians. They were friendly and made the token Englishman welcome in the bar.





Day two Sunday

Picked up at 8 again and off to the dive centre, I was able to speak with the manager and sorted out my pre booked Nitrox course to start on Monday with Alaa. Ryan didn't want to be restricted on his depth of 12 metres, so in his words "Scabbed" a junior advanced course out of me - this he started on the second dive of today. Ryan and I were the only divers on the boat, which gave us 5 star treatment today.

Dive one was SHAAB TALATA a pleasant reef made up of a big erg which we swam around with a bottom time of 51 minutes and maximum depth of 10 metres. The usual suspects live here Pennant Fish, Butterfly Fish and Clown Fish.

Dive two was the first without each other as Ryan started his advanced course and was one on one with the instructor Alaa, I was one on one with a Divemaster called Khaled. The site was called SHAAB PETRA and supposed to be named after a guide who found this site. It is again near Magawish island and is made up of a large erg and a smaller one with a sandy bottom between them. The smaller erg has a tunnel running through it. I did a 63 minute dive here to a depth of 10.3 metres. Ryan did a 34 minute dive and some skills with Alaa.

In the evening I went to town on my own and purchased a new mask I had seen the evening before. Returning to the Hotel having left Ryan studying for his course, we then went to eat at the

Big Brothers restaurant and again were not disappointed. Ryan was again looking for his bed at 9, so I was left to the mercy of the Hotels entertainment and the Russians.



Day three Monday

I started my TDI Nitrox course today and enjoyed my first dive on a 32% mix on the dive site called ABU RAMADAS for the second time this time we went to a area which drops down to a depth of 29.1 metres and had a bottom time of 45 minutes. Again the boat was not full and I was able to do this dive with Khaled and another Russian diver. Lots of marine life and a very large Moray made this dive. Ryan did some more skills and 21 metre dive for 29 minutes with his instructor Alaa.

After another great buffet lunch on board "TINY" the second dive site was GOTA ABU RAMADA east. This is close by Abu Ramada island and is a large coral block. I did a 60 minute dive here with a maximum dept of 14.1 metres on a 36% Nitrox mix. It is nicknamed the aquarium as the fish life here is fantastic. Ryan got his drift dive signed off here doing 16 minutes at 10 metres.

The evening was spent reading up on our respective courses until Ryan fell asleep at about 9. I then went to the hotel bar for another evening of entertainment.



Day four Tuesday

This was another dive site called SMALL GIFTON in the national park on the east side of Giftun island. This site has two plateaux prior to a drop-off going down 40 metres+. This was a quick drift dive along the wall and over the plateaux. On the wall there were Giant Gorgonians and larger marine life. Using a 32% Nitrox mix I completed a 45 minute dive at a maximum depth of 29.8 metres. Ryan was suffering with a dodgy tummy and a case of sea sickness so sat out the mornings' dive.

After lunch the site was GOTA ABU RAMADA west this is the other side of the coral block and boasts two large pinnacles to swim around. Again you can see why this dive site is nicknamed the aquarium. I did a 53 minute dive, maximum depth 14.3 metres, on a 36% mix. Ryan despite his dodgy tummy did manage a 14 minute dive at 10 metres. But couldn't complete his navigation skills to qualify for his junior advanced ticket. Unfortunately this was Ryan's last dive due to feeling unwell for the next two days. So has come away with a referral. Back at the dive centre I took my TDI Nitrox exam and was passed by Alaa the instructor.

This evening was spent as normal with Ryan hitting the sack at 9 and I hitting the Hotels entertainment I seem to recall this was a MR Sultan contest. Russians strutting their stuff on the stage to win an hour's scuba diving!



Day five Wednesday

We again dived on the reef of SMALL GIFTON, the weather had turned and a strong wind was blowing so this was the most sheltered site to dive again. I did a 45 minute dive maximum depth of 29.6 metre on a 32% mix. Lunch was again good although Ryan didn't partake and was feeling rough all day.

The second dive was on the same site for 60 minutes at 9.8 metres. I was now getting a bit fed up of seeing coral and was hoping to do a least one wreck but this was not on the schedule.

Evening was the usual format and I strutted my stuff on the dance floor with my adopted Russian family.



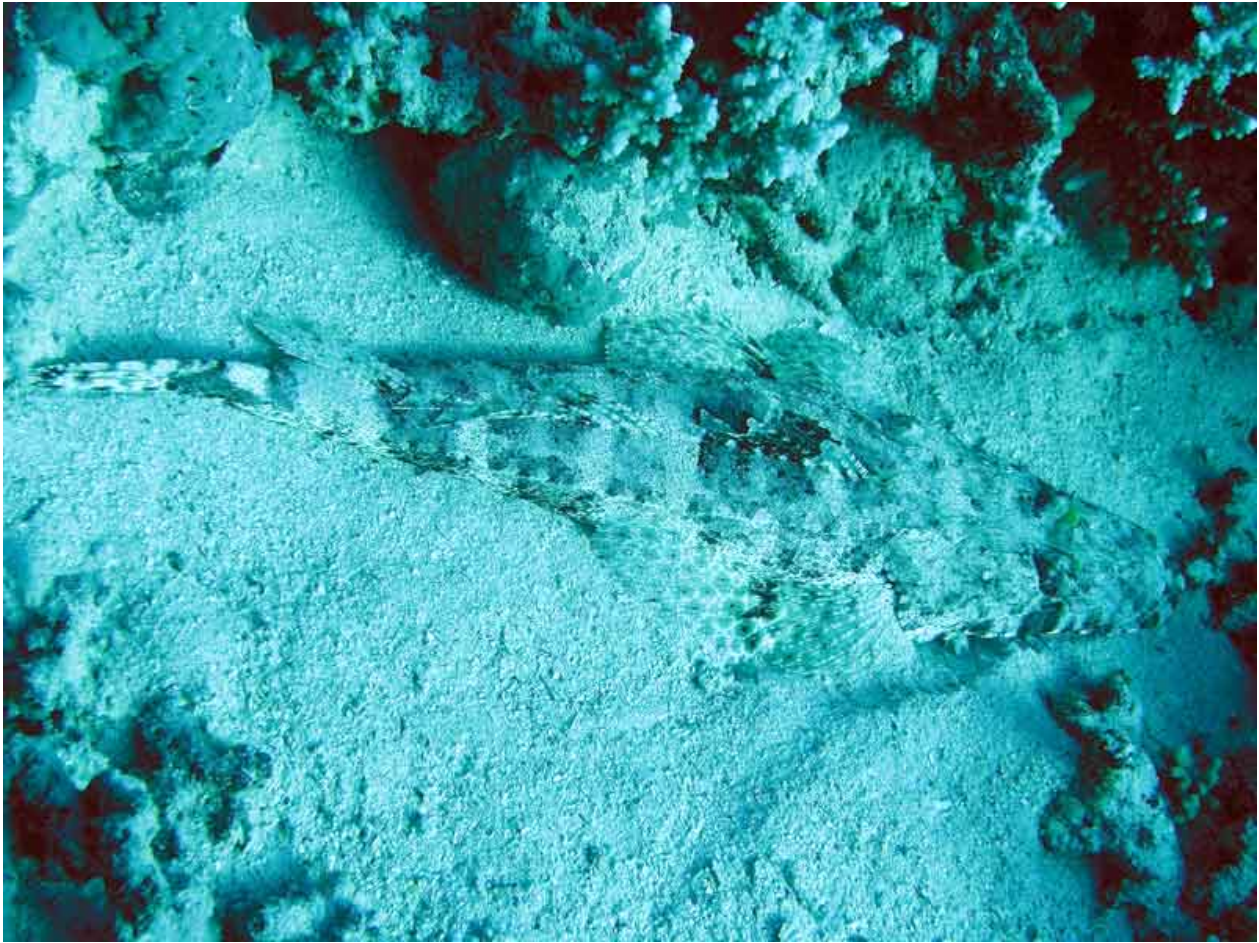
Day six Thursday

A new site was visited ABU HASHISH this is the farthest south the dive centre goes in a day. It is a place where hashish was smuggled in from the Sudan. The dive boat moored in a sheltered lagoon and we swam through a cut in the reef to the outside wall where our dive started. I did a 52 minute dive, maximum depth 26.5 on a 32% Nitrox mix. Fish life was abundant, and the corals impressive.

After lunch we moved sites to RAS DISHA again in the south this site has a wall and 5 or 6 ergs to explore. One of these ergs has a vertical hole within it and is filled with glass fish very impressive. I did a 64 minute dive here, maximum depth 13.6 metres on a 36% Nitrox mix. Ryan did attempt to dive here and did enter the water to try and qualify on his navigation but was unable to descend, the body was stronger than the mind as nausea took hold.

Back at the dive centre the paper work and invoices for the week were completed and certificates presented. I can say that all the employees of Divers Lodge are profession and friendly a big thank you to Alaa, Khalid and all the staff. After washing the kit we arrived back at the Hotel.

After a meal the packing was completed. The usual routine of early night for Ryan and a dose of Saturday night fever for me.



Day seven Friday

Chilling by the hotels private beach was the order of the day and both Ryan and I were well looked after by our Russian friends as they were all inclusive, sharing beer and ice cream with us until we had to leave at 4pm on the transfer coach. We even were able to change in one of their rooms as we had vacated ours at 12 and the hotel would not supply a changing room unless a payment was made.



The flight back to the UK was uneventful and landing at 11pm UK time meant we had a 5 hour sleep at Gatwick until our train back to Swindon in the morning.

Overall a great diving destination if you like coral and these types of dive site. The Hotel Sultan Beach was not the highlight of our stay, the food at breakfast was poor and the Hotel could do with a lick of paint.

Divers lodge is a well run facility and I would dive with them again.