



Cruising on the Seven Seas: Two Weeks of Underwater Wonders, Dec. 2016

Trip Report by Susan Hapgood, Stephen Glascock & James McGillicuddy Spanfeller.

We came, we saw, we dove! And dove again! We marveled at least twice a day at the extraordinary diversity of underwater life in Raja Ampat. Fifteen New Yorkers enjoyed life on the Seven Seas for two weeks, reveling in the scuba diving, the sun, the gentle rocking of the waves, the delicious food, interspersed with a voluminous number of naps and cocktail hours, often timed in proximity to sunset. We could not have had a more congenial and coordinated crew to make it all as exciting, comfortable, and enjoyable as possible, led by our expert activities director, Karl, and our captain, Wahyu.

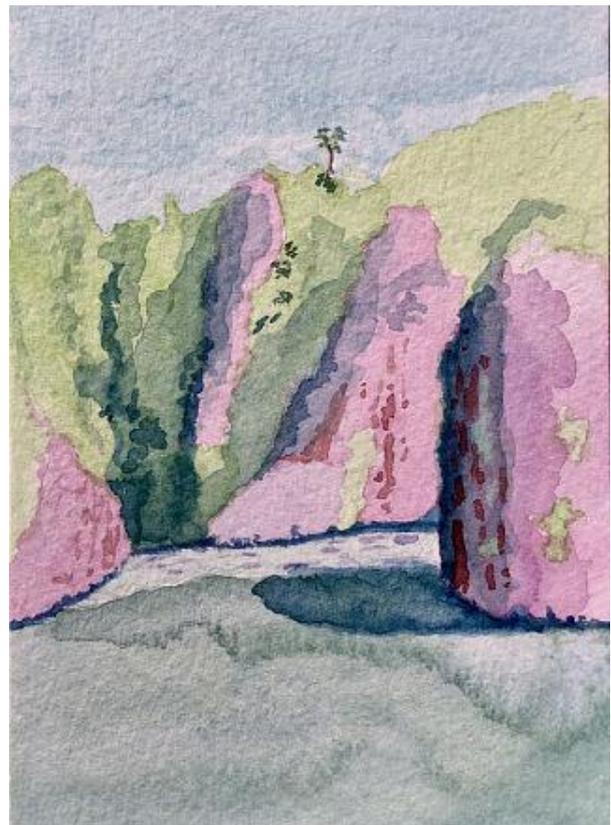


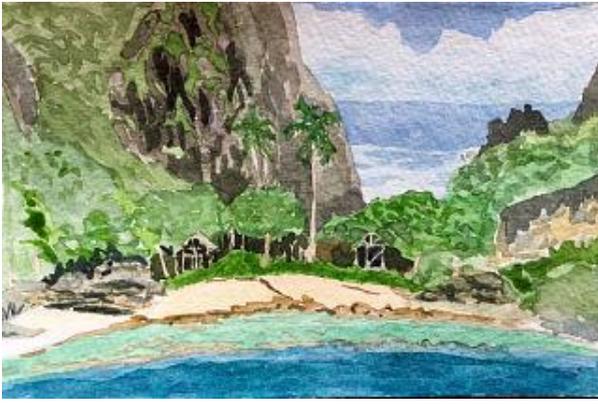
The dramatic beauty of the limestone cliffs, palm trees, wild orchids and bleached sand (thanks to the parrot fish) is deceptive. Below the water is the real magic; the most biodiversity on the planet,

beautiful undersea gardens, giant clams, majestic mantas. How fortunate we are to be aboard this floating classroom. Wait, what does a hydroid look like again?

Each day unfolded in similar yet different ways. Triggerfish one day, giant clams the next, and the grand master of the area, manta rays, on a few other days. It was on the second of our appointed dates with the mantas that the experience of Karl and the team of the Seven Seas really stood out. The main dive site for the mantas at Dampir Strait was more than crowded with other live-aboard visitors. What was more, the creatures we had come to see were nowhere to be found on the "Cleaning Stations" that were the focal point of the dive site. No worries, Karl and his mates knew of a place close by that might offer some joy. And indeed it did. We dropped into the water with snorkel equipment and were soon surrounded by mantas swooping in from seemingly all directions, up close and personal. We later went to the dive site and took our place along the viewing line but nothing was as good as the free swim that only we among all the other dive boats were able to take advantage of.

Another high point was the visit to the Tomolol cave of Misool, and the ancestral burial grounds of the local pearl farmers who lived in a village built on stilts. After stopping by a few cliff cavities with visible human remains and offerings, we disembarked from the tenders to venture into a cave straight out of Raiders of the Lost Ark. With a flotilla of explorers paddling with boogie boards, life rings, anything that assisted with flotation, we ventured deeper and deeper into the cathedral-like space. Cave swallows provided the music as we drifted between giant hanging stalactites, approaching an oculus spewing rays of sunlight. Climbing up a slippery incline out of the cave, we dove into a freshwater lake on the other side before returning back to the mother ship.





Toward the end of the cruise, we were treated to a lively and engaging musical performance by the multitalented crew, with Marwan, Ardy, and Jeffrey on guitars and Nico on the bongos. The Glascock group (Barbara and Steve Glascock, their son Alex and daughter Adrienne, and Alex's girlfriend Katie Martinez), and the Spanfeller clan (Peg and Jim, their three daughters Anna, Stef and Jamie, and Anna's boyfriend PJ), and the Schwarz/Hapgood family (Susan and Aaron, their son Sam, and daughter-in-law Anna) felt extremely privileged to cruise in Indonesia in such luxury. We had endless discussion of forthcoming political change in the United States, cultural attitudes towards waste disposal, and the initially forbidding prospect of two weeks without internet. We spent an obscene number of hours in supine peaceful camaraderie, side by side, reading book after book, resting between the many activities so perfectly planned for us.

Susan Hapgood, Stephen Glascock & James McGillicuddy Spanfeller,
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