

WVSAC Red Sea Safari 22-29 Apr 11

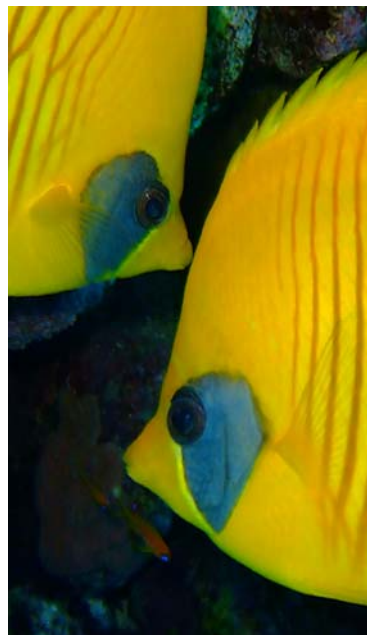


On Fri 22 Apr 11, four members of Wreake Valley SAC, Louise Castle, Gary Vale, Andy Rylott and the writer, Tim Moxom, embarked from Birmingham Airport on a week's diving safari in the Red Sea on the MV Emperor Superior out of Hurghada in Egypt.

The safari was the Northern Wrecks and Reefs tour, heading north-east from Hurghada across the strait towards Sharm El Sheikh, west to the Thistlegorm and Rosalie Muller, before heading back south for the final dives off Hurghada.

The MV Emperor Superior is a well-appointed 38m vessel with berths for 22 guests in 11 en-suite cabins. It was a very cosmopolitan trip - in addition to the four of us from WVSAC there was one other Brit, a Polish couple, two ex-pat Aussies living in UK, 6 South Africans, two very friendly and accommodating dive guides - Daniela from Venezuela and Csaba from Hungary - and of course the Egyptian crew. 15 divers (plus two guides) meant that space on the vessel was less pressured; with a full complement of 22 it would have been rather crowded.

The rear diving deck comprised two benches running laterally across the craft with twelve stations on each and a pull out box below to stow weight belts/pouches, DSMBs, slates, and all the other paraphernalia associated with diving. It was a pleasure to set up the cylinders, BCD and regs once at the beginning of the trip and only have to remove the first stage after each dive for refills, with Nitrox, generally 28% to 30%, included in the price.



Three of us had also hired 3 litre pony cylinders which attracted interested enquiries from other divers - these, it would seem, are not as common elsewhere in the world as they are in UK diving.

Most divers wore full wetsuits of various thicknesses, in some cases supplemented with rash vests or neoprene undersuits. I, having somewhat more integral insulation than others, was comfortable diving in a 5mm shorty. Water temperatures were 22 - 24°C with the lowest temperature recorded at 20.5°C on the deepest dive, the Rosalie Muller at 40m. Daytime air temperatures approached 30°C on occasion but the sea breeze kept the edge off, falling back at night to require a light fleece on the upper decks in the evenings.

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22 dives were on offer and, as a newbie to the Red Sea, I enjoyed every one, whether reef, wreck, drift or night dive. Dives were either directly off the rear diving deck to the reef alongside or wreck below, or delivery to and recovery from dive sites using the two Zodiac inflatables.

The wrecks were the Markus, the Carnatic and the Ghiannis D at Abu Nuhas, the Dunraven, four dives on the Thistlegorm (of course), three on the Barge at Little Gubal Island, and a brace on the Rosalie Muller.



Daniela, Louise, Csaba, Tim, Andy and Gary.

The reefs included Sha'ab El Erg, Abu Nuhas, Alternatives, Shark and Yolanda Reefs and Jackfish Alley at Ras Mohammed, Um Gamar, Giftun Island and Gota Abu Ramada.

As I originally learned to dive with PADI, and I'm working towards their Master Diver qualification alongside the excellent (and far cheaper) BSAC Dive Leader training programme, I took another three PADI Speciality courses whilst on the safari; Nitrox, Boat and Night Diver, which caused my companions some amusement as I worked through the Knowledge Reviews whilst they enjoyed a cold beer or two.



All in all I found my first Red Sea liveaboard immensely enjoyable, an experience I recommend to any diver - and satisfying; I achieved depth progression to 40m, my first Nitrox diving, three PADI courses, mid-water DSMB deployment (not always without mishap!), logged 22 dives and nearly 18 hours underwater, and of course had the pleasure of photographing the profuse coral and marine life in the Red Sea. WVSAC's next trip is to Skomer in June.

Thanks go to Louise for organising the trip, the dive guides Daniela and Csaba for their knowledge and hospitality, and the crew for their plentiful and well-presented food and assistance with kitting up and delivery to dive sites.

The final comment is to acknowledge the quote of the week, for which honours go to Andy; on the final day, having packed and whilst checking the cabin, a pair of boxer shorts were found lurking at the back of a cupboard. On presentation to Andy he said, without blushing, **"Oh yes they're mine, I came in them!"**

Photos: MV Emperor Superior, Hawksbill Turtle & Red Sea Anemone Fish - Tim Moxom,
Masked Butterfly Fish - Louise Castle, group picture - Andy Rylott.
Written By Tim Moxom