

## Red Sea Trip October 2015- Hamata

I had intended to make my 2013 trip to the Red Sea my swan song and indeed stuck to my resolution by not going on the Clubs trip in 2014. A good decision as it turned out as the trip was not one of our best holidays. By January 2015 I was beginning to get withdrawal symptoms and put my name down for the October trip. Then I found that it clashed with another holiday I had already booked (see my Colombres diary) so had to cancel. A few months later it emerged that there were two others (Mick Marchant and Richard Vivian) who could not make the club official holiday so we formed a breakaway group and booked the same itinerary but 3 weeks later (departing 28<sup>th</sup> October '15). The trip we booked was through Oonasdivers and was aboard Emperor Divers boat MV Asmaa. Departure port was Hamata which is a tiny fishing village about 2 ½ hours South of Marsa Alam airport. As our flight did not get into Marsa until 10pm it was near 1am before we got to the boat and around 2am before we got to bed.

There were 5 other brits on the boat one of whom, Colin Williams was by cabin buddy for the week and dive buddy for most dives. The rest of the passengers were from various locations and all had arrived the previous day so had already done one days diving, coming back to port in the evening to pick us up. Our dive guides were Anke and Momo (with whom we had dived on a BlueOTwo trip a couple of years back). They were excellent as were the entire crew. The food was also very good, possibly the best we have had on a liveaboard which is saying a lot. Boat was very good though it did have a rather rounded bottom which tended to make it roll a lot in rough seas of which we had quite a lot during the week.

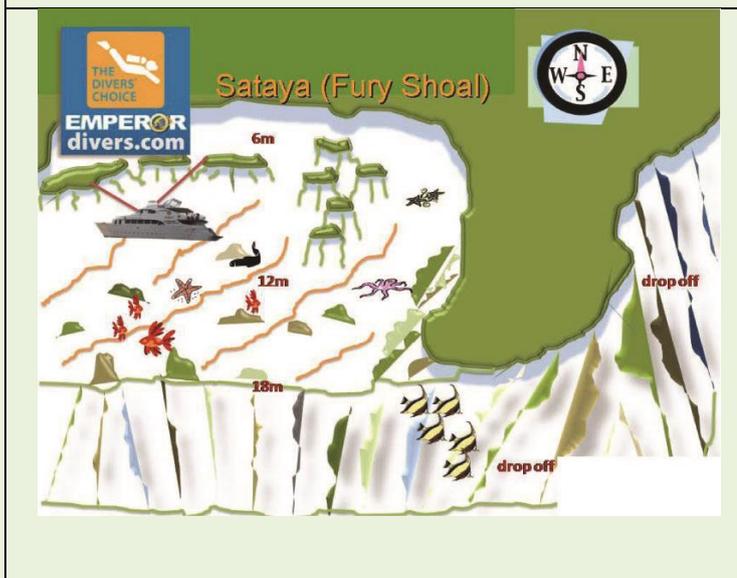
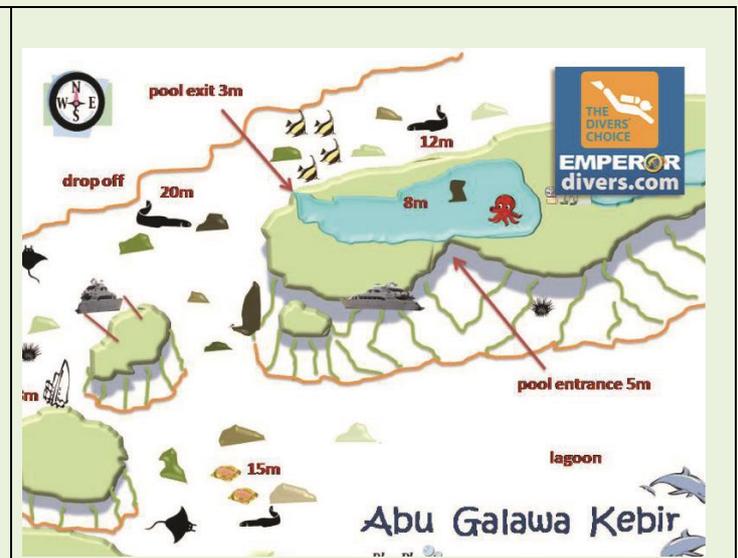
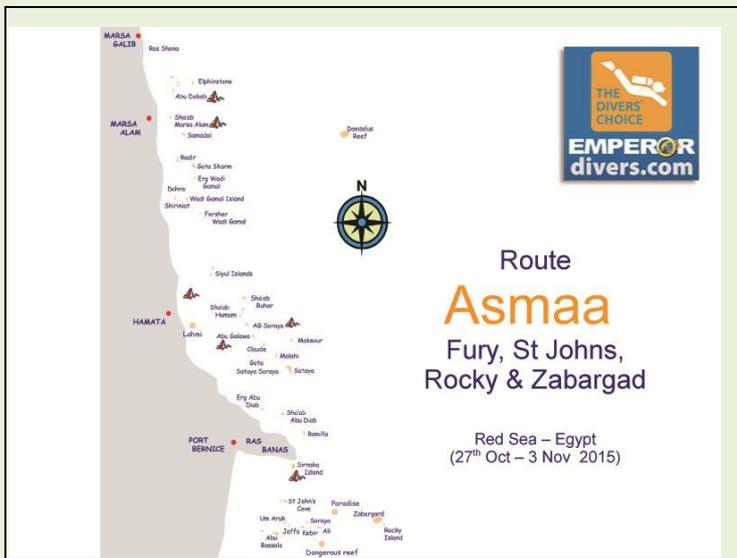
The itinerary was a pleasant surprise as once we had the check dives out of the way Anke announced that we were going across to Rocky and Zabaragab. This was not expected and our fellow club members had not visited these islands on their trip. However, tiger sharks had been seen at Rocky recently and we were lucky enough to see them as well. The rest of the trip followed the expected pattern with 1 ½ days spent in the St Johns area and the rest on Fury Shoal or in the Hamata area itself. About half of the sites we visited were new to me and were really excellent. We also had a snorkelling session with loads of dolphins; the first time I have ever been to a location called Dolphin House (Reef or whatever) and actually seen a dolphin!

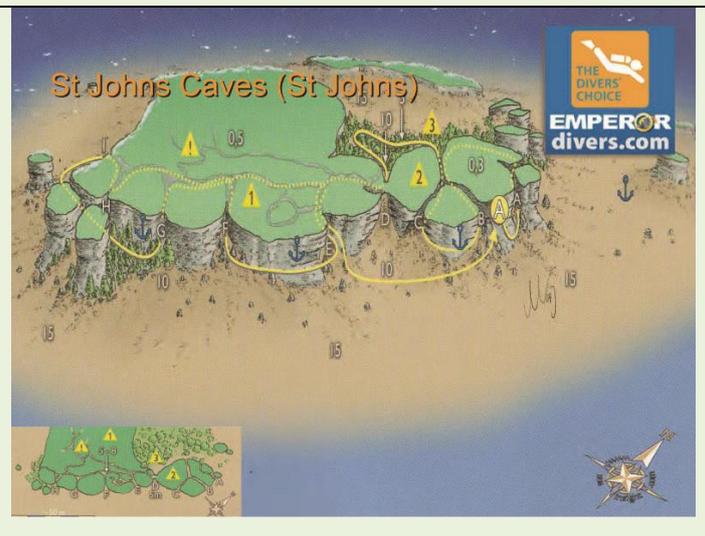
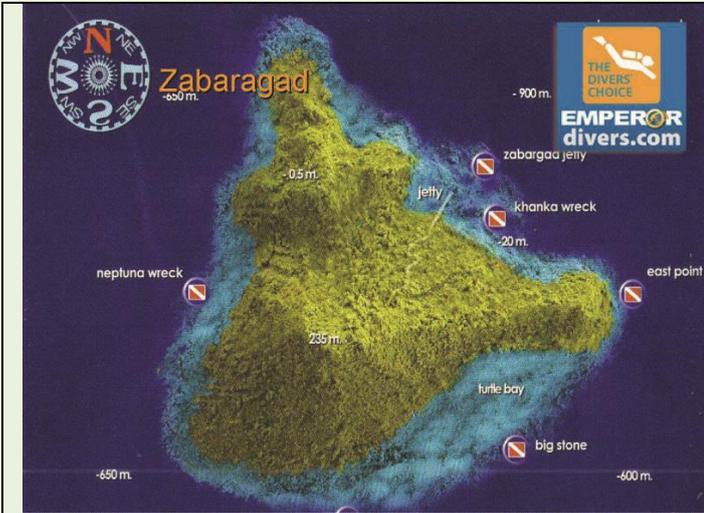
Overall it was a very good trip but there were a few features which I felt could have been improved for anyone thinking of taking the same trip. The first one is to consider time of year. Up to October, the flight leaves at 2pm UK time and does not get to Marsa until 9pm (10pm by the time you clear arrivals) after which there is a further 2 ½ drive to Hamata. Same applies on the way back as the departure is circa 10pm meaning a 2:30am arrival at Gatwick. Flight times are better in November in part because UK is back on GMT. Second issue is the practise of having arrivals (and hence departures) spread over 2 days. This undoubtedly compromises the amount of time you can spend in St Johns and Fury Shoal and effectively means that 2-3 days diving has to be close to Hamata to allow time to get back to port to pick up or drop off passengers. Our last day in particular was very rushed. We did our first dive finishing circa 8am then went back to Hamata to drop off some passengers. Our second dive was at 11am then we were back to Hamata and off the boat by 13:30 to catch the bus to Port Ghalib where we were put up in the Marina Lodge hotel for the night. Not my favourite hotel, must have the worst food in Egypt – the fare on Asmaa was a million times better. Final issue was the hotel wanted the rooms cleared by 12 noon and we were on half board. However it transpired that the other 5 Brits had booked through Tony Backhurst and they had rooms until departure and were on Full Board. You can guess who I would book with if I ever go again and it won't be Oonasdivers.

Having got that off my chest I will state again that overall it was an excellent holiday which could easily have been even better. These are the dives sites we did, there were 4 night dives offered but we only did the last one which turned out to be far and away the best – how lucky was that?

1. Abu Gobawa Kebir – 53mins 16.4 M	2. Sataya East Wall 65mins 23.6M	3. Rocky Island East 58 mins 28.4M
4. Rocky island West 55 mins 35.4M	5. Zabaragad South 50 mins 25.4M	6. Habili Ali 50 mins 28.4M
7. Big Gota West Cave 55 mins 27.5M	8. Small Gota 50 mins 19.1M	9. Paradise 62 mins 32M
10. St Johns Caves 68 mins 17.7M	11. St Johns Caves 69 mins 13.9M	12. Malahi (the Playground) 60 mins 21M
13. Shaab Hamam (Stairway to Heaven) 42 mins 25.4M	14. Gota Lahmi (Night Dive) 41mins 25.5M	15. Gota Lahmi 64 mins 22.4M
16. Mahabis (Hamata) 45mins 25.5M		

A selection of pictures of the trip is below. Mostly we used video so the pictures are mainly low quality stills extracted from the videos. Hopefully I will be able to link in some of the more interesting video clips. Mick and I took most of the pictures (as yet I have seen nothing from Richard) and as usual where we both took the same shots, I have included the best in the album below and given credit where necessary.









Click picture to see video



Click picture to see video



Click picture to see video



Click picture to see video



Click picture to see video



Click picture to see video
