
2011-12 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

9-15-2011

Diving on the Great Barrier Reef

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Recommended Citation

Tobiska, Ashley, "Diving on the Great Barrier Reef" (2011). *2011-12 Postcards*. Article. Submission 1.
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/intl_postcards_1112/1

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Diving on the Great Barrier Reef

So today was my first day diving, and it was no place other than the Great Barrier Reef. As you can imagine, it was an absolutely incredible experience, and something that I can now cross off of my bucket list! We had such a hard time deciding what boat to go on at first, but we finally decided to go big or go home with Passions of Paradise. It was a beautiful catamaran boat, with a small, friendly crew, and plenty of room to move around. The first dive location was off of a sand bar in the middle of the reef. Our quirky Aussie dive instructor got us all suited up and dang, those tanks are heavy!!! Finally geared up and ready to go, we made the leap of faith into “the shark infested waters.” We began by practicing breathing, clearing our masks of water, etc. etc. Then with an instructor ratio of 4:1, we all link arms and go off on our way. We started off the dive with a slam, and saw a giant green sea turtle! It was a little bit disappointing that we still had to link arms and follow the instructor, because I probably would’ve followed that turtle all day given the choice. There were so many different types of coral and so many fish I had never seen before, in all different shapes and colors. The only other bummer is that my ears weren’t equalizing like they should, so for the first dive I could hardly get a metre below the surface. But that was the first dive, and yes, we did decide to go on the second one when we saw the massive reef at the next site. It also helped that they gave us a two for one deal for our second dive.

At the second site, we got our snorkel gear on and hopped in, despite the crew giving us trouble for not going on a second dive. Once we stuck our heads in the water and saw that this was the reef that we had pictured coming here in the first place. This was the reef teeming with life, and coral beds the size of two story buildings, the kind you see on National Geographic, we decided it was worth the 22 extra bucks! So frantically, we swam back and got our diving equipment on. Immediately, we saw a fish that probably weighed as much as I do. And this fish absolutely loved the attention!! It would swim right in front of our faces, and we would photograph away. That underwater camera seemed to do us well, considering we had taken around 520 pictures by the end of our trip! We also saw another giant speckled fish, which looked a little intimidating, and a bit like it wouldn’t mind eating us, but with 4 other divers around me, I felt safe. My favourite part of the dive was swimming along the wall of the reef. I had never seen so many species in one place in my life. The reason I say species, is that some of the animals were so bizarre looking, I couldn’t even tell you if they were in the animal or plant kingdom to begin with. It is really difficult to write about this experience because of that reason. You have to see it to believe it and you have to

experience it to know the feeling. I was also feeling a little woozy to more metres I sank. My ears were a little bit better, but I was the only one in the group that had to stay about 2 metres above everyone else, because my body was not handling the pressure well. Also, as I write this, I am feeling the effects of the diving on my body... especially my chest. Because our lungs are not built to sustain that type of pressure, it puts a lot of strain on that area. My ears still feel a little funny, and when people talk to me it sounds like they are standing in a 5 metre hole in the ground. But my instructor informed me that they should feel a lot better tomorrow. I can't imagine going 30 metres or more down! Which I know people do all the time. I only went, probably at maximum, 3 or 4! But I was still in awe of everything I got to see: sea cucumbers, bizarre looking coral, and electric blue fish. Like really, really electric blue.

It was the experience of a lifetime, and I was definitely very impressed with my Great Barrier Reef experience.

Ashley Tobiska