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VOL 212

St. Some New Year



Cebu, Philippines

WAKING IN A NEW COUNTRY AGAIN

PALM BEACH RESORT & SPA

WHATEVER! THE WORDS RESORT AND SPA ARE RELATIVE WORDS. I GUESS, IN MY LIFE NOW, ANY PLACE WITH WOMEN, BEER, AND BACON IS A RESORT.

My Holiday was truly the Infinity Liveaboard experience. It ended on December 29th. I couldn't find a Liveaboard to fill in the time with a trip for New Years and still make it back to Saudi for school on January 6th. Instead, I booked the trip with hotel stays in Cebu, Philippines.

The beach resort turned out to be a hotel with several pools, a deserted restaurant, Massage and "VIP" rooms - whatever "VIP" rooms are. I'm not naive to think they are business meeting rooms unless some of the guys write off their vacation experiences. Pretty shady. Whatever.

After the mini-van dropped me off at 10am on the 29th, I was informed I couldn't get into my room until 2pm. Go with it. I ordered a plate of bacon and some beers to take down to the pool area. I needed a lot of time to plow through my dive videos and pictures, write the December St. Some Times, and get started on this one.

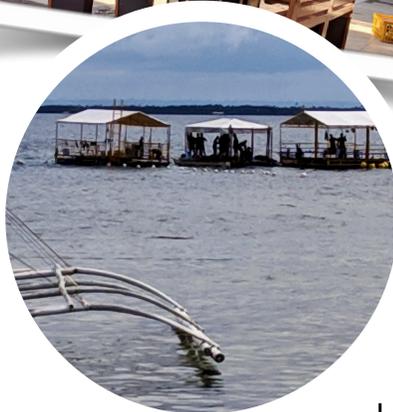
The restaurant staff is not too sharp. Whenever I finished my bucket of beers (3 before the ice melted), I had to walk up two flights of stairs and refill my order. I found it quite weird, because I did this for three straight days and they'd be sitting on the balcony watching. Hmm. One of them, just one of them could have come down to check on me and bring a fresh bucket. Don't you think?

While I was focused on my writing, there was a fury of activity surrounding me the entire time. There is a dive shop just below the "resort". The office is right along the main pool. Imagine about 100 Chinese students learning their Open Water or Advanced PADI courses! That's what was going on the entire time I was sitting by the pool writing and sipping beers.

When I initially arrived, I had asked the dive shop if there was a spot to go for a fun dive. She couldn't believe I was asking. With an incredulous face, she told me they were completely booked. Dodged a bullet anyway. How could I have been happy diving with a bunch of students right after my recent experiences underwater?

It all became routine. The DMs haul tanks back and forth. Students take all the tables and the pool while they wait to get ferried out to the class barges for "confined" lessons or get started in the pool. The restaurant staff watch me drain beers and type on my laptop. I go up for a new bucket every couple of hours. Just another day.

I needed the relaxation and time to write. My book is closer to being complete. I still have a lot of work to do. Once in a while, a beautiful woman would walk by or step into the pool. But, most of them had the proverbial large white man accompanying them. I sure don't want to fill that cliché. I'd rather rely on good 'ol serendipity again and meet the right woman. It's been close before. I can wait.





ÜBERESOLUTION

Waking up on a volcanic beach between two palm trees. Diving off the island of Borneo with reef sharks. Skiing in a small city in Canada, using my father's antiquated Loonie bills to buy Joe and I drinks because only one ski run was open. Wandering through the streets of Singapore. Lighting a Chinese Lantern and watching it float out over the ocean in the night sky. The stories just write themselves. As of 2002, I have been waking up in a new country every New Years. I might go somewhere for Christmas and end up somewhere else to watch the "ball drop". No matter what, it has to be a new country on my ever-growing list. Who knows how long I'll be able to continue, but I'll give it a go.

Take a look at my list so far....each one is its own story.

01

GREEN BAY, USA

The New Year celebration leading up to my career

02

USA

I traveled home after my initial 6 months overseas. This was when I made my resolution.

03

BELIZE

Diving with Linda in Belize. We spent Xmas in Honduras.

04

NICARAGUA

Five days on a Volcanic beach between two Palm Trees. I went with Ron & Lila and Lila's family before Ron & Lila were married.

05

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Skiing with Paul Mooney in Farayah. We dove in Dahab just before leaving for Lebanon.

06

KOH TAO, THAILAND

Escaping Kuwait, Mario Fiallos and I experienced Bangkok first and diving at Bans in Koh Tao the first trip there.



17 YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG

My new years resolution of 2002 - to wake up in a new country every New Years Day has turned out to be the only resolution I've actually kept in play. What's the longest you have kept one of your resolutions alive?

07

KUWAIT

Perhaps the WORST EVER. Mario and I played Command and Conquer in a Shisha bar for 24 hours. Most excitement was on Kuwaitee pouring water over another's head!

08

SINGAPORE

Alone at the Apartment of Sue and Grant. 2 weeks exploration.



09

BORNEO

Diving with Kris & Steve via Scuba Junkies. Top diving I have ever experienced, even after all these years.

10

BONNAIRE

Alone for two weeks in ABC's diving with Buddy Dive Resort.

11

VENEZUELA

NY's with local girlfriend Veronica and her family.

12

SURINAME

Whirlwind tour with Scott, Tara, and 4mth-old Elsie across Trinidad, Guyana, and Suriname. Top most *memorable* trip.

13

TRINIDAD

First Xmas since 2002 home. Hit Trinidad on the way back to VZ to wake up NY's in Trinidad.

14

NICE, FRANCE

Xmas in Berlin, followed by the Biking tours of Nice, France with Carol. Man she SNORES!

15

CANADA

USA for Mom and Dad's 50th Anniversary. Joe's Idea was to ski in Canada to fulfill my NY resolution. FUNNY.

16

SWITZERLAND

Germany Xmas with Matt & Stacy family, then Philipp & Tini, then NY back in Lugano.

17

SAUDI ARABIA

Xmas on a Maldives Island with Matt & Stacy and Kids. We headed back to work for NY's day in Saudi.

18

SRI LANKA

Diving up North and local Xmas with Danu's Family. NY was spent on Safari with Kristin and Madu's family in Tissa.

19

PHILIPPINES

Infinity Liveaboard, Bacon, Beer, Palm Beach "Resort & Spa"

A Quiet Night in Cebú

For me it was very quiet. The “resort” included a New Year’s buffet. I had to check it out. Besides, the cook in my solo restaurant was so busy making the food for the buffet, he’d probably spit on my food if I ordered room service. As for wandering the streets? I really didn’t feel like it.

The “resort” put a valiant effort into their beach buffet. Someone had raked the sand on their cement slab beach. An array of plastic tables and chairs had been set up under instant foldable awnings. The foods featured a seaweed soup, pork adobo (with a plethora of bones in it), heaps of rice, fried fish?, lots of ketchup and assorted questionable sauces, cupcakes, and weak icedT. The assortment of beer, alcohol, and soft drinks were added to your room service bill.

I sat and ate a plate of rice, baked chicken, and pork adobo with a few beers while I watched the band. The band consisted of a drummer on an electric drum board, a bassist, a statuesque guitarist, and a rather large Filipina singer offering up a set list of soft pop slow songs and a few

Sinatra hits thrown in for good measure.

I suffered through three songs by the time my adobo was gone. Adding one more beer to my room tab, I wished all the workers a Happy New Year and left the “party” on the “beach”.

I stopped at the front desk to ensure they had arranged for a taxi at 6am. I had let them know upon my arrival, but I wanted to double check. Sure enough, I was promised a taxi and a 5:30 wakeup call as ordered.

My sparse bags were ready to go. I crawled into bed with the brand new Pendergast novel loaded onto my iPad, ready to fall asleep reading.

Sleep would not come for many hours. The Philippines is a lot like Suriname on New Years. **LOUD!** Everyone is setting off fireworks of their own. The bar a block away was pumping out a dance baseline that rivaled even the passing cars that were blasting their own subwoofers. I lay awake for a long time after my tired eyes couldn’t follow Pendergast anymore.

Manila Airport is Nerve-racking

Ok, so from Cebu, it was an hour long domestic flight to Manila. I even planned a 2 1/2 hours for my transfer. Both of my flights were with the same carrier (Philippine Airways-PAL) but I had to go from the domestic terminal to the international terminal and track through passport/customs control. I almost didn’t make it.

I landed on time but the shuttle between the terminals wasn’t there. After 10 minutes, I paid a taxi \$20US to get me from terminal to terminal. When I offered the septuagenarian driver another \$20 he started weaving through traffic like we were being chased in an action film. Whew.

I was at the airport 20 minutes later, with just an hour before boarding.

Only half of the customs booths were open due to construction. The only way to skip ahead of the two hundred or so people was if a flight clerk came looking for you. I asked. “Sorry sir. Wait in line sir. They’ll call you sir.”

Somehow, I made it to my gate with 20 minutes to go before scheduled takeoff. Imagine my surprise when I boarded a near empty plane. The captain informed us we would be waiting for more passengers. We waited another 45 minutes. Joy. I spread out across three empty seats.