

Dolphin Expeditions



It was with great pleasure that I accepted an invitation to run an introduction to freediving course aboard 'Indigo' a fully outfitted 91 foot (28m) liveaboard operated by Geoffrey Hanan of Dolphin Expeditions (<http://www.dolphinexpeditions.com>)

Geoffrey has been running these excursions for longer than anyone else in the Caribbean, and he knows where to find the dolphins and how to behave with them.

On Sunday night we left the dock in Bimini in search of the dolphin grounds, and we were rewarded almost straight away on Monday, with two very sociable Atlantic Spotted dolphins.



You have to forget about the idea that these mammals might behave in a way similar to a domesticated animal, following on your heel.

They are wild animals, free to follow their fancy, and this could just as easily be eating, mating or playing amongst themselves as it could be indulging the awkward and gangly humans who bruise the surface of the water.

Dolphins like it when we fit in with them, so it is best to keep your arms by your sides and fins together. They particularly like it if you dive straight down, turn and come quickly to the surface, and will meet you with a spiraling escort that opens around you on the surface.

What surprised me the most was how close the dolphins came to me; we were like dancers who face off and move around each other as close as possible without touching. The bubbles I let trickle from my mouth tickled up the belly of the nearest dolphin as we spiraled together. Barracudas will often try and stare you down, or dog you around the reef, sharks and jacks will circle you, and cleaner fish will come and trim dead skin, but this is all the language of food: predator and prey; host and symbiont. A dolphin approaches you for the same reason that a dog will fetch a stick, with the difference being that wild dogs don't fetch sticks...

How much of it is personification? If a dolphin's mouth curved down instead of up would we see them as such cheerful creatures? You can strip away all of that and I would still have the sensation that there was something more to the encounter. Coming up off the sandy bottom, locked in a slow ascending spiral, the dolphin was studying me, following my movements, waiting for a cue... What that cue might have been I still don't know, but I can't help thinking that it might be some kind of elaborate game, a game that shares similarities to the tease of a beautiful girl, who will move around you, ever closer, to the point where your bodies or lives are almost touching, but the moment you make an awkward move or initiate contact she will vanish with a flick of her skirts.

I could have easily caressed the dolphin's flank, or even taken hold of its dorsal fin, but in case dolphins have a memory - and I'm sure they do - I didn't want to spoil my chances.

Of course there was the course as well - and it is always exciting and rewarding to see people with no experience in freediving make their first steps and fall in love with the sensations. At the end it's hard to get them out of the water!





All of the stunning photos shown above are courtesy of Mark Corcoran, and are copyrighted.

For more information on freediving courses run in cooperation with Dolphin Experiences write to info@verticalblue.net.

WOW ! That looks like absolute fun. Wish I was there. Hopefully it will be repeated. Let me know Wil if you plan another one of these trips.

by deya Mounir on 2008-04-28 12:18:56