

Tonga

August 2014



Arriving at the airport on Vava'u group of islands after 50 minute flight from Tongatapu, the capital of Tonga



A typical Polynesian welcome with leis



Real Tonga Airlines - a twin engine turboprop, MA60 (Chinese)



All about swimming with whales – up close and personal



As above

So Below



The whales are closer than they look because of wide-angle lens on GoPro Camera



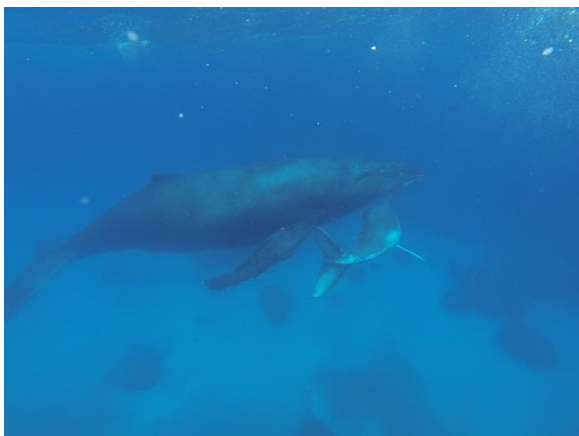
It also picks up the other divers



The depth varied from a few meters to hundreds of feet. We saw many mothers with calves and they did not appear to be concerned about us in the water with them.

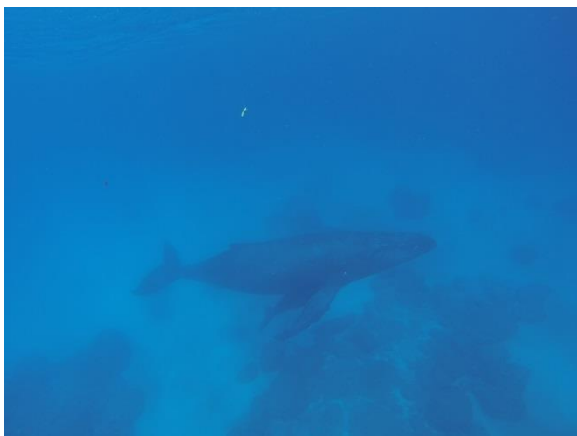


See the calf joining the mother





The GoPro also washed out the colors as the whales went deeper



The mothers would hover at a greater depth while the calves surfaced every few minutes for air.



The GoPro has no viewfinder so I had to aim in the general direction and hope I got the shot. It was set to take five frames each time I pressed the trigger.



Note the GoPro camera is on my wrist



Victoria watched from the boat most days and had whales come along side. Below is Ali, the boat driver



This inflatable boat named Monkey Man was what we used most of the time. This is harder to reenter from the water.



The Dream Catcher was the intended craft but had mechanical problems.





This was lunch on a deserted island



Whales within inches of the boat



With swimmers



This was a pod of about eight whales



Mentally I had asked for contact, but this display was well beyond expectations. It was an amazing show for about 45 minutes – rarely ever seen!



Note the colors in shallow water



And the change to deeper water





The last day Victoria (a non-swimmer) decided she would get in the water. This is very brave of her to go in where you cannot see the bottom!



In the water with Sonia



Swimming out to the site



Here she is getting set to enter the water with Sonia who took her out to the waiting whales.



Coming back towed by Darren



Coming back aboard the Dream Catcher



More whale photos

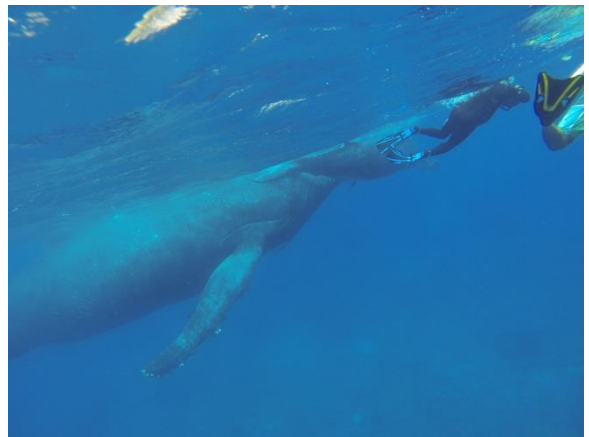


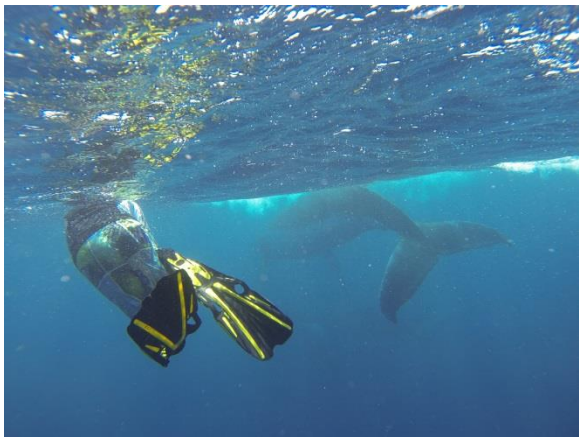
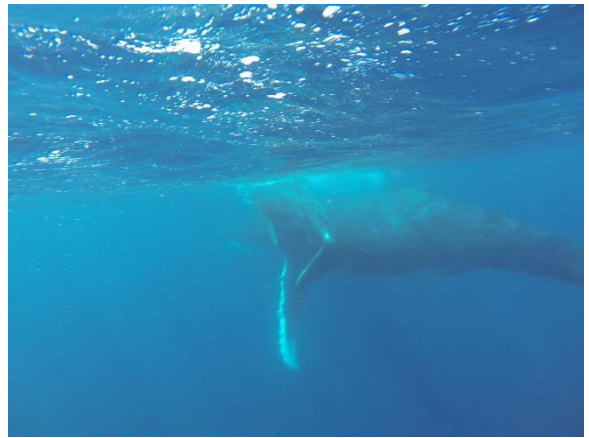
A photo by Darren Jew of the whale Victoria saw. The tour leader, Darren is one of ten Cannon Masters and an underwater specialist.

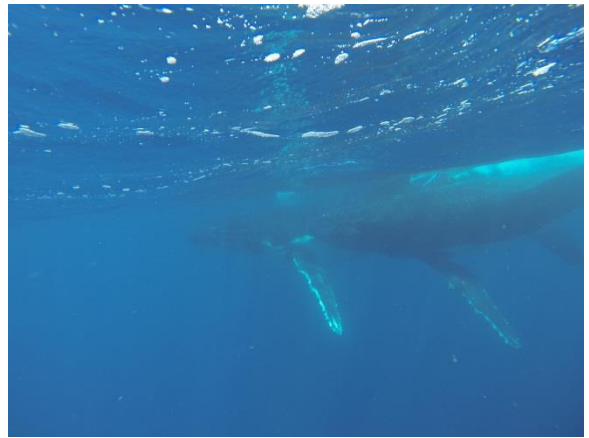


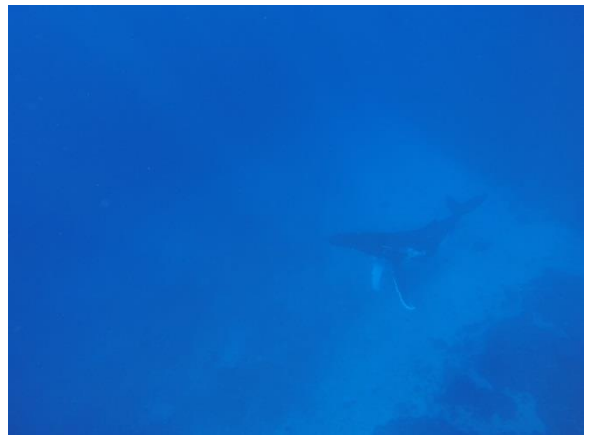
This is Darren diving down to take photographs at another site.









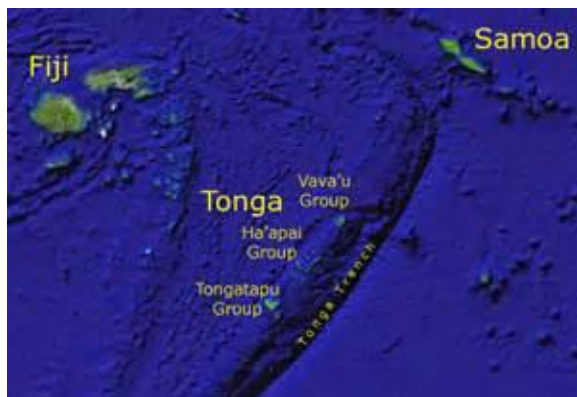


Note the deep water color change

Where in the world is Vava'u, Tonga



The house we stayed in leased for the season



Victoria with Darren Jew the tour leader
from Australia

(Even 72F feels cooler than you might
expect – take a jacket)

**This is a fantastic experience
and worthy of any Bucket List**





Prominent sign in Neiafu



Port area



The local port area



Average street with pigs running loose



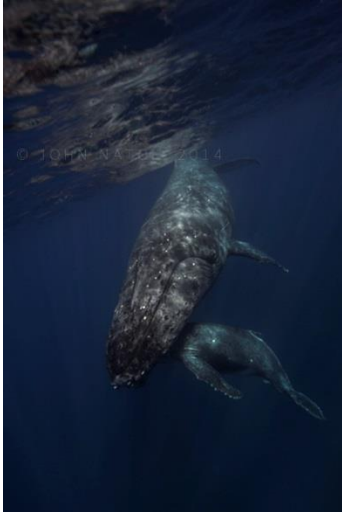
With Alistair Coldrick and Sonia
He runs Dolphin Pacific Diving which has
many of the boats and tours in Vava'u



(Vanity photo by Darren Jew)

Just do it!!

The following were shot by professional underwater photographer John Natoli on the same trip and shared with us.





Yes, the water was that clear



This is John Natoli with me



You can certainly tell the photo pros from the amateurs – But still a great experience.