



2nd OceansWatch Reef Check Training in Tonga

The cruising season in the South Pacific is coming to a close and some cruisers have already made their way to New Zealand, where they'll stay over the hurricane season.



Among the OceansWatch www.oceanswatch.org members heading back for the 2nd time are Beth and Ken Cone on *Eagle Wings* and David and Gail Funk on *Fifth Season*. But before making the passage they've taken the OceansWatch Reef

Check course in the Kingdom of Tonga. This is the 2nd course run in Tonga for OceansWatch members the 1st was in April this year and had ten participants.



OceansWatch member, Glenn Edney owns and runs OceanBlue Adventures on the island of Foa www.tonga-dive.com is accredited by Reef Check to run their Eco-diver Course for OceansWatch members. He has considerable knowledge and experience of the underwater world, having been diving in Tongan waters since 1992 and written a book on New Zealand's Poor Knights Marine Reserve. Assisted by Janey Pares (OW Media and Membership), they run the course from their dive and whale watching base in the Ha'apai Islands. Rachel Agnew, an OW member who runs www.scubadive.net.nz - a diver forum - also joined them for the course.

The location is beautiful, Ha'apai is Tonga's best kept secret, and the perfect place to learn about the coral reef - a sheltered, turquoise lagoon, whose horizon is dominated by the dormant volcanic cone of Kao side by side with Tofua, an active volcano that is infamous for hosting the mutinous crew from the British Navy's HMS *Bounty*! There are no other dive operators based here and it is particularly ideal for cruisers, as they can anchor off the beach, safely tucked in behind the reef and come ashore each day for instruction. The theory which involves plenty of identification of substrate, reef health indicator species - fish and invertebrates - bleaching and predation, damage and disease, is taught at OceanBlue Adventure's base behind the beach. The underwater practical work is undertaken from both the beach and the dive boat, making use of the Home reef and other reefs further off-shore in the lagoon.

The course ran for five days of intensive learning with each day involving both theory and practical sessions. Several theory tests and a full underwater survey completed the course and need to be passed in order to gain the qualification. All the participants happily passed and said the following about their experience:

"What a wonderful opportunity to learn and be useful at the same time."

"Every day brought new insights and surprising facts!"

"The last 12 years of diving I have focused on fish identification and photography. The Reef Check has really opened my eyes to the variety of coral and invertebrates."

OceansWatch links sailors and divers together with marine conservation projects, as well as forming partnerships with local island communities to work with them to find practical solutions to some of their most basic of problems.

www.oceanswatch.org

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