

Javea Trip Goes Down



Iona Murray has been a Javea regular since Rab Ronaldson moved out there in 2004 to run his own Dive Centre. However her most recent trip proved eventful and here she reports how she was caught in the eye of the storm ...

THREE YEARS ago Rab Ronaldson, then NDO of ScotSAC, disappeared off into the sunset to run a dive centre in Javea on the Costa Blanca. I first visited Rab in November 2004 (see **SCOTTISH DIVER** March/ April 2005) just after he took over the helm of Amigos del Mar, a well established Spanish Dive Centre.

A lot has changed since 2004. The 17m hardboat has had substantial repairs, paint jobs and engine overhauls; and now sports an expensive looking sun shade and one of the best designed dive

boat ladders I've ever used. The dive shop is stocked with shiny new dive kit, which can be easily transported to the harbour in the new 4x4 pick up truck. Both Nitrox training and supply (up to 100%) is on offer, a rare find in Spain. And of course, last but not least, Rab also seems to have acquired a new wife - I think I can safely say we all saw that coming the minute he met Ali!

Over the past three years, ScotSAC members have probably kept a small charter airline in business by visiting Rab. Individual and club expeditions from East Lothian, Musselburgh, Pentland, Peebles, Hamilton, Johnstone, Strathclyde University, Moray House, Arran and Boness Branches have all visited, most on more than one occasion.

I've taken three club trips out to Javea at various times of the year. For me, the appeal is certainly the price (large villa for £50pp and flights at around £100), but primarily the ability to take divers (and non divers) of all stages. On our most recent trip, the party ranged in ability from experienced Master Diver Regional Instructors, to someone who was afraid of the water and couldn't swim. Rab understands the ScotSAC system, and can tell your diving ability from one look at your log book. Three years diving the Costa Blanca has given him a detailed knowledge of the shoreline, enabling him to pick dive sites to suit everyone.

The diving is relaxed and it's a good environment to introduce trainees to the ease of a hardboat (and warm water!)

diving, so it's well suited for club trips. Javea is a family orientated resort so most people bring their non-diving families with them too.

A new dive site for me this year was El Escull. The site is marked by a small islet, and characterised by an underwater pinnacle which rises from a depth of 22m to around 7m. At the base, a curving tunnel takes you through the pinnacle and out the other end in around 27m of water. There is then a choice of around five swim throughs, all teeming with sea life. The site is well known for its friendly congers. On our dive a free swimming conger spent several minutes circling through the group of divers. We also spotted several moray eels and a school of barracuda.

A local diver, Rafa Martos, has now produced a comprehensive guide to diving on the North Costa Blanca. This well illustrated book covers a significant number of the dive sites in Javea, and is well worth a read before planning the day's diving.

On a more sombre note, the last day of our holiday was disrupted by a significant storm. Nine people lost their lives at sea, three of them from Javea. A large number of boats which had been moored in the river lost their moorings and were washed ashore. At least three dive centres lost their boat, and main source of income.

Thankfully, Rab's boat was safely moored in the harbour, and suffered no damage. Within a few days, the town was back to normal and incoming tourists had no clue what had happened.

On past visits to Spain I have come away

A Storm

words & pictures
Iona Murray



with a false sense of security about diving there - the clear visibility, light equipment and abundant sea life give the impression that diving is easy and relatively hazard free. On the morning the storm began the sea was calm. On arriving at the dive centre at 9am, we were all disappointed when Rab said the day's diving was cancelled as the wind was going to pick up. I have to admit, in the back of my mind I was thinking he had gone a bit soft - recalling many occasions where we'd dived together in Scotland through what seemed like gale force winds. The dramatic change in sea state within only a few hours was a reminder not only of the power of the sea, but of the importance of having local knowledge of the area.

I asked Rab what message he'd like me to convey in this article - I was expecting some kind of sales pitch about the Dive Centre. Instead, he asked me to tell everyone that he is a lovely, well mannered, polite, pleasant, handsome, youthful, sun kissed (NOT orange) young man with a full head of hair. I hope Ali doesn't get a fright when she wakes up in the morning and meets this man.

For more information about Rab's Dive Centre visit his website at:
www.amigosdelmarjavea.com

Images (clockwise from top left): Diver Kate enjoys the Mediterranean viz; negotiating a passage through the tunnel at the bottom of the pinnacle; an octopus; more colourful Spanish underwater life; after the storm; staff and visitors at 'Amigis del Mar'.

