

JOINING THE MANTAWATCH INTERNS FOR MIP 2019

I arrived with Ange in Labuan Bajo to complete shock as to how much had changed since my last visit to see Guy in 2010. From a tiny little village with a broken pier and hardly ever enough Internet connection to upload a manta video it has turned into a more bustling town, with many more dive shops, boutique hotels and even a Starbucks! While the greater choice of restaurants and ability to easily use What's App was welcome, it made me realise that Manta Watch is more essential than ever.

There was a lot of discussion in the news recently about making the National Park prohibitively expensive and a lot of discussion locally about the impact of all of the additional tourism. If done correctly, it can really help the environment by showing locals that money can be made from protecting rather than destroying the marine life.

We were joined this year by Dock Komodo - run by Susan, they are an association which gives guide lines for all of the local dive operators to follow including things like number of visitors allowed to visit a certain dive site per day to keep numbers down and promoting sustainable tourism.

It was incredible to see Manta Watch in action. Andy runs a very well planned and structured internship and he was very pleased to have us along to give our insights as to why we continue to fund it and also to give the interns some more connection to Guy's Trust. I gave an evening seminar in what we do, why we fund MantaWatch and talked about what Guy was like and why this was important to him and therefore to us. The interns asked some really insightful questions, and they told me they could really feel as if they knew Guy as a person, and what his spirit was. Willem asked, "so do I understand that if Guy hadn't passed away none of us would be here right now?" It was very touching and personally made me feel that everything that Guy's Trust has done to date and how many people we affect has all been so worthwhile.

Ange also gave fantastic seminar about visual story telling to the interns, which gave them interns' perspectives. Overall I think the interns were some bright young minds and were keen to focus their future endeavours on sustainability. Andy said that roughly 75% of the previous interns were directly working in the conservation industry now, so I believe we have made a strong impact.

On a personal level for both Ange and myself, it was a healing trip. Both apprehensive about visiting Labuan Bajo, we found that it was helpful the town had moved on so drastically but were happy to see some old faces who remembered and welcomed us. We had a drink (or five!) in Guy's honour on his birthday at Paradise bar, and reminisced about the countless memories Guy left with us. We thoroughly enjoyed the visit; Andy said we are welcome every year!

Joely Brammer, November 2019