



02.05.2016
NEWS ALERT

***DISCOVERY Yacht P2 successfully returns from Cuba
following participation in the SeaKeepers E3 Cuba Experience***

At the end of 2015, The International SeaKeepers Society announced its E3 Cuba Experience – an opportunity for yacht owners and charter guests to explore Cuba with the SeaKeepers mission of marine education and conservation at the forefront. The E3 Cuba Experience focuses on observing and learning about Cuba’s environment above and below the water while traveling the island primarily by boat. This type of exploration via yacht provides access to more remote destinations and a unique Cuban experience. Participants return with a better understanding of the island’s marine conservation efforts, the connectivity existing between the ocean and society, and an overall greater appreciation for the marine environment and its inhabitants.

The program was officially inaugurated with DISCOVERY Yacht P2’s journey to Cuba in late December 2015. As part of the program, SeaKeepers provides the participating yacht with a DISCOVERY Detective kit, field guide and marine science training with emphasis on Cuba’s marine environment and ongoing research initiatives. Activities in which a yacht can participate vary by location, travel routes and season.

D/Y P2 began its scientific initiatives even before entering Cuban waters with the deployment of a SeaKeepers Drifter in the Florida Straits. The SeaKeepers Drifter is one of the main elements of data collection under the DISCOVERY Yachts Program and is an ocean-monitoring instrument that can easily be deployed from any size yacht, and once activated, the drifter makes ongoing oceanographic measurements as it travels along ocean currents. Drifter data is made publicly accessible and is used by numerous international organizations for everything from weather predictions to water pollution to search and rescue.

Once D/Y P2 had safely arrived and cleared into Havana, the owners and crew participated in several marine science activities intermingled with Cuban cultural experiences. The vessel formed a DISCOVERY Detective Team consisting of guests and crew, who were responsible for noting reef health, fish abundance and anthropogenic influences.

The team observed reef and cave ecosystems during coastal snorkeling off Havana and SCUBA diving in the Bay of Pigs. Team members reported a larger number of divers and low visibility but a healthy population of sea fans, sea cucumbers and reef fish at the first dive site. The second, deeper dive was off a wall covered with sponges and soft and hard corals. During these dives, the P2 divers worked alongside Cuban divemasters to spear several lionfish, an invasive species that is now found profusely throughout the Caribbean, which were fileted, prepared and served to everyone once back onboard the yacht. The final dive at Cueva des Pesces was in a blue hole where the team experienced the effects of fresh and salt water mixing and explored underwater caverns, which sheltered rare shrimp species.

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During their visit to Cuba, P2 owners and crew were not only immersed in the Cuban marine environment but also the Cuban culture. After a long day of diving, the evenings ended with dinner at local paladars and walks through Old Havana. Understanding how to best help protect Cuba's marine environment, especially as U.S. regulations continue to change and increase tourism to Cuba, is directly related to recognizing and appreciating Cuban culture.

Captain Jonathan Kline of S/Y P2 deemed the trip a success stating, "The International SeaKeepers Society was instrumental in the planning and execution of our voyage to Cuba this year. The owners, their teenage son, and the entire crew became immersed in the projects and activities that were recommended by the Society. We were most impressed with the balance between the scientific activities we were asked to pursue and the genuine enjoyment we were encouraged to take from every area we visited. P2 looks forward to working with The International SeaKeepers Society in the future as our voyages take us to areas that SeaKeepers wishes to investigate and protect."

SeaKeepers has received inquiries from numerous vessels that have expressed interest in Cuba's marine environment and conservation efforts. Program information can be obtained by emailing crrobinson@seakeepers.org or www.seakeepers.org/Cuba. The International SeaKeepers Society recognizes the need to protect Cuba's marine and coastal ecosystem and help preserve already protected areas. Cuba's reefs are some of the largest and most pristine in the Caribbean, and over twenty percent of Cuba is already protected. To this end, SeaKeepers aims to advance and support the efforts of scientists and their research in Cuba through the E3 Cuba Experience.

About The International SeaKeepers Society® The International SeaKeepers Society is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization focusing on the health of the world's oceans and climate. SeaKeepers works with the boating and yachting community to take advantage of their unique potential in order to further marine research and to raise awareness about the issues our oceans face. The International SeaKeepers Society acts as a global catalyst working with governments, scientists, industry, and other marine organizations to further its mission and to support sensible, achievable marine protection and restoration. **For more information visit www.seakeepers.org.**

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