

Australian Air-Ferry

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November Newsletter

Merry Christmas

And, a special thanks to everyone that we've moved aircraft for this year



We've been back to Saipan, hanging out with the crew at Skydive Saipan.

It was a fantastic way to end an amazing year, we tracked along the coast from Mackay, to Cairns (overnighted Cairns), Horn Island, to Madang (New Guinea overnighted), and then direct to Guam, and across to Saipan.

The guys at Saipan really look after you, so it was a magnificent few days.

Brief history of Skydive Saipan

Supported by crutches, from a bad knee injury from playing Rugby League, John Stewart approached a Chamorro (local Islander) businessman Joseph Reyes (pronounced `ragus`), and it was Jo that helped establish the business on Saipan.

"It was late 1995 when a 185 Cessna took its first load of jumpers to a lofty departure above Saipan," John Stewart explains.

“Skydiving in the middle of the Pacific was virtually unheard of, so people were able to try something very new on their holidays.”

“Tandem Jumping was relatively new as well, anyone can be Skydiving within an hour of arriving at the office.”

Only very experienced Skydivers were hired for the job, usually hand picked, and recognised by their peers as being the best in the world.

The number of jumps is indicative of their dedication to the sport, and they averaged 11,000 jumps each, with the highest being 16,000 jumps, over a thirty year period.

The passengers, (95% Japanese) are picked up from their accommodation, driven to Skydive Saipan, where they complete the appropriate documentation, they are then thoroughly briefed with the help of a Video and Japanese staff.

They then get introduced to their Tandem master (TM), outfitted accordingly, and loaded into the aircraft for their climb to 8,000ft or 14,000ft agl.

The Tandem master wears a special parachute made for two people. The passenger wears his/her own harness, and is clipped onto the Tandem master (TM) about two mins before exit.

Once out the door the TM throws out a drogue, which is a small round parachute about one metre in diameter. This Drogue, does 3 things, first it makes the freefall stable, secondly it reduces the speed of two people to approximately 120 mph (normal terminal velocity) and thirdly, it pulls the main parachute out of the container at opening height (5,000ft AGL).

Depending on the height, the freefall can last up to 50 secs, it takes about 10 secs to reach terminal velocity, then it takes 5.5 secs per 1000 ft, then the parachute ride last for one min per 1000ft, approximately.

Once the parachute is open, the TM and passenger can talk to each other, and can then enjoy the gentle but fun ride to the landing point.

Like any business, Skydive Saipan has had its share of ups and downs, in the late 90's it was plain sailing, the Japanese economy was strong and the company expanded rapidly.

The Cessna 185 was replaced by a ten seater Piper Navajo, every time the plane took off it carried four tandem pairs and two camera staff.

By January 1997 they had seven full time instructors working long and prosperous days. In 1999 rising fuel prices and the necessity for faster more comfortable aircraft, forced owner John Stewart into a Banderiante.

But John couldn't sit on his laurels several Typhoons ripped their homes and the office apart. There was a Tsunami warnings which required an evacuation, and a local Vulcano decided to erupt, covering the island with volcanic dust.

After the 9/11 attack the business just ceased, this was the most destructive thing that the business had encountered so far. The business depended on tourism which disappeared overnight.

The Japanese tourist themselves were too scared to travel, and Saipan gradually turned into a ghost town.

One year later the tourist started coming back, but a war started in Iraq, and then there was the Sars virus, causing tourism to remain at an all time low.

The lack of work forced some great TM's and cameramen back to their point of origin.

It's been a while since the company's been affected by another natural disaster and the company's made a slow, but determined recovery.

A new PAC XL750, (ferried by Australian Air Ferry) worked in Saipan for several months. And currently John's operating two Navajos and a supercharged 182 Cessna.



A Time to Reflect 2005



Sometimes you had to wear silly looking hats



Sometimes we had flowers on our head



Sometimes our pilots did things they didn't really want to



But most of the time it was good just to be airborne

All the best for the new year from Australian Air Ferry

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