A welcome to the Red Sea.

 In the penultimate week of March Surrey Dive Centre ran a trip to Soma Bay in Egypt. We were staying at the Breakers 4\* Dive & Surf lodge within the Soma bay resort. The area is about 45 minutes south of Hurgada.

 The resort also includes several other hotels such as the Sheraton and the Cascades. There is an 18 hole golf course and spa facility.

 The diving at Breakers is run through Orca dive centre who also organise daily kite surfing activities a short distance down the coast.

 The diving:

Orca are a predominantly German run outfit, quite efficient with quality hire kit available. Nitrox is provided for those who are qualified.

There are regular day boat trips from the centre with sign and info sheets on the centre wall. Night dives are offered every few days.

 Boat trips: Range from 1.5 hours trips wrecks like out to Saleem Express to nearby reefs less than 30 minutes away. Food can be bought on the boats for a small fee in cash that goes directly to the crew.

 Shore diving: This is all done from the 420m long jetty. There is a golf cart shuttle for kit (and divers). There’s very little shade on the pier so sun block, hats, shirt are useful for walking down and kitting up.

 There is a large pool like area contained within the reef about 2m deep that has its own access steps. Even at high tide there is less than 1m of water over the reef so swimming out from here isn’t an option.

 Access into the sea is by ladder or giant stride (you need to go in the right place as depth isn’t great). From here the reef drops away in a series of terraces. It’s possible to potter along in 2-3m or descend a little over the edge to 6m.

 There are further shelves at 12-18m & 24m and 30m. In most places between these more level areas the reef slopes rather than drops straight down so it’s easy to follow a depth contour.

 Near the surface there are small breaks in the reef that lead into shallow sandy areas about 6m deep. These provide a sheltered area to practice skills or just watch the pale Snake eel (eels not sea snakes) wind themselves through holes in the rocks.

 There is plenty of marine life; green turtles, moray eels, Butterfly fish, Rays (Blue spotted stingrays to one end of the house reef), Trigger fish, Mud skippers on the pier legs amongst the Barnacles and of course the coral itself.

 The site is a great introduction to diving and an ideal training ground, water temperature during this trip was 22C with minimal current. You can get a surprisingly strong wind on the surface that pulls your DSMB should you put one up. It wasn’t especially choppy and you can dive in most weather conditions.

 The goal of this trip was to complete the PADI DSAT TEC 40, 45 & 50 programmes. This introduces twinset/multiple cylinder diving skills, decompression, extended no-stop diving, nitrox up to 100% oxygen and stage cylinder handling. Depth progression is to 50m maximum with air as the primary breathing gas.

 Although this type of course may not appeal to every diver I think the TEC 40 is a useful extension to recreational diving skills for those who have already done the PADI Deep specialty. It introduces the use of a redundant gas supply and extending your bottom time at shallower depths by carrying additional breathing gas and a 50% nitrox mixture for limited decompression.

 All in all a very enjoyable trip. Some hard work developing skills but very good company and a great atmosphere.

 Many thanks to Sue for organising the logistics, Vernon for teaching, Ian, Gerry & Jess for your good humour as dive buddies.