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**Q&A: KIRSTY ANDREWS**  
WE CHAT TO THE UW  
PHOTOGRAPHER ABOUT  
HER LOVE OF UK WATERS

**TECH: HIDDEN WORLDS**  
EXTREME LOCATIONS INCL.  
WORLD WAR TWO WRECKS  
AND FLOODED MINES

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*TEST EXTRA: ORCATORCH ORCA 7 DIVE LIGHT RATED*

# The Great SCUBA DRIVE

**Go Diving  
2026**

Comprehensive report  
from the dive event  
of the year  
inside!



**Rico Anselmi and Sophie Shields** continue their trek through Great Britain, venturing further north into the **Lochs of Scotland**, and then on to complete their HSE Scuba course in the **Sound of Mull**

**+** THE ARENUI, PT II ▶ BAHAMAS, PT II ▶ MONTY'S MUSINGS

# ABOFA

Aqaba Blue Ocean Future in Action

## About the Event

ABOFA – Aqaba Blue: Ocean Future in Action 2026 is a comprehensive international exhibition & experience platform dedicated to Diving, Marine Technology, Water Sports & Adventure, Tourism & Ocean Lifestyle.

Taking place in the heart of the Red Sea, ABOFA aims to transform Aqaba into the region's leading hub for diving, marine innovation, & coastal adventure industries.

The event brings together global brands, innovators, researchers, divers, investors, & marine professionals to connect, collaborate, showcase technology, conduct demonstrations, & engage in Themed Activities & B2C experiences.



# 9-12

## September 2026

Aqaba International Exhibition Center (AIEC)

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→ [www.abofa.jo](http://www.abofa.jo)

## Target Sectors



Diving & Underwater Sector



Marine Technology & Innovation



Water Sports & Adventure



Underwater Photography & Gaming



Boats & Marine Equipment



Tourism & Lifestyle



Education & Training Workshops & Startups



Themed Activities

## Show Summary

# 80+

Exhibitors

# 20+

Workshops

# 50+

Speakers

# 4000+

Visitors

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## GO Diving Show 2026 a roaring success!

I am still in recovery mode from the GO Diving Show (or more accurately, the aftermath, in particular the six hours it took to drain, dry and dismantle the gigantic pool!). More than 16,000 people filled both halls over the weekend, and there was a palpable buzz of excitement for the coming year in the air.

Sunday was very busy, with people wandering the halls right up until we closed the doors at 4pm, but it was dwarfed by the truly epic Saturday, which saw exhibitor stands constantly bombarded by enthusiastic visitors, with many running out of products, advertising literature and hand-outs by that afternoon!

The talks, be it the star-studded Main Stage or one of the dedicated secondary stages, were all well-attended, with those by TV favourite Steve Backshall and Last Breath commercial diver Chris Lemons, in particular, absolutely rammed to the rafters, while the interactive elements of the show, including the Just One Ocean Marine Biology Zone, the Nautical Archaeology Society's 'shipwreck survey', and the Historical Diving Society's intriguing display of old-fashioned diving equipment.

Turn to page 48 for a full report on the weekend's activities, and all I can say is, roll on 2027 - it is going to be a belter!

Elsewhere in this issue, we have a Q&A with British underwater photographer Kirsty Andrews, and we have part two of Rico Anselmi and Sophie Shield's Great Scuba Drive through the UK, culminating in their HSE Scuba course in the Sound of Mull in Scotland.

**Mark Evans, Editorial Director**

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**SCUBA DIVER**

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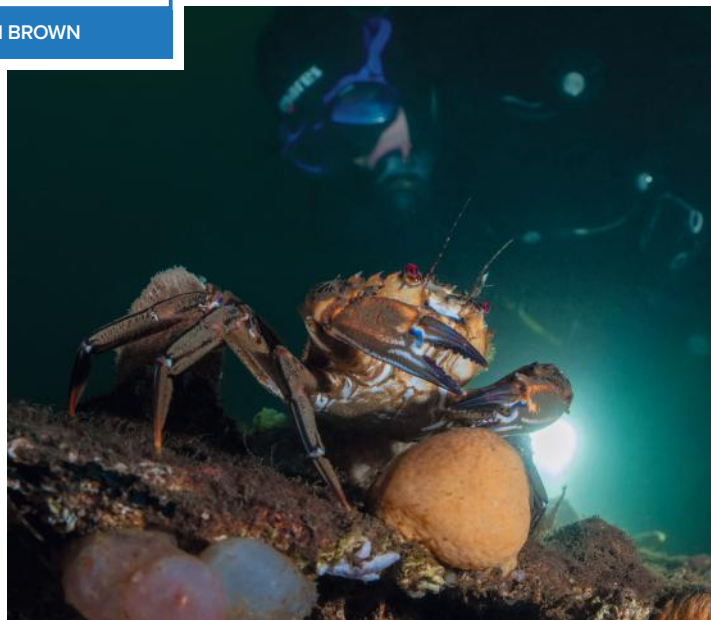
*The Great*  
**SCUBA DRIVE**

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PHOTOGRAPH © JASON BROWN



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Bo Pardau says this is how he feels every time he returns to the Atlantis Resort properties in the Philippines, be it Puerto Galera, Dumaguete, or the Atlantis Adventurer, and he was keen to see if he'd get that same feeling on the new Infiniti.

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*"Best coral ever. Great staff. We had outstanding guides. Resort buildings and layout are attractive and functional and the operations for snorkeling and equipment were easy & convenient. The bungalow was very comfortable. I really appreciated the help at the airport!"*

*~ Charles Glass (April 2025)*



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# INDUSTRY NEWS

Each month, we bring together the latest regional industry news, as well as all over our water planet. To find out the most up-to-date news and views, check out the website or follow us on our various social media channels @divernetuk  
[www.divernet.com/news](http://www.divernet.com/news)



## AGGRESSOR ADVENTURES' CEO WAYNE B BROWN PASSES AWAY AT 65

**A**ggressor Adventures has announced with profound sadness the passing of its Chief Executive Officer, Wayne Bryant Brown, who died on 3 March at the age of 65, following a private one-and-a-half-year battle with bile duct cancer. He was surrounded by family and close friends in his final days.

An Air Force veteran, world traveller, devoted family man, and passionate explorer, Brown was more than the leader of Aggressor Adventures. He was the heart and driving force behind the company and a champion of the spirit of exploration that defines the Aggressor brand.

Born 30 January 1961, in Jacksonville, Florida, Wayne was the son of Jennings Bryant Brown and Ruby Jane Brown. Growing up on a small farm in rural Florida, he developed an early love for exploration, hard work, and new experiences – traits that would shape the course of his life.

Wayne proudly served his country in the United States Air Force for eight years, achieving the rank of Staff Sergeant before being honourably discharged. While stationed in Biloxi, Mississippi, in 1981, he met the love of his life, Dana Dunaway. The two were married on 20 June 1981, beginning a partnership that would span more than four decades. Shortly after their marriage, Wayne and Dana moved to Germany, where he was stationed for four years.

Following his military service, Wayne began a career with Taco Bell Corporate and later became a highly successful Taco Bell franchisee, building and operating more than 60 restaurants between 1989 and 2006.

Wayne's love for scuba diving began as a way to spend time with his children, but it quickly grew into a lifelong passion. In 2007, after first experiencing the Aggressor Fleet as a customer, he purchased the company and began expanding its reach and vision. Under his leadership, the company evolved into Aggressor Adventures, a global adventure travel brand offering world-class liveaboard dive expeditions, river cruises, and Signature Lodges in destinations across the globe.

Brown's impact on the scuba diving and adventure travel industries will be felt for generations. Under his leadership, Aggressor Adventures earned numerous accolades, including recognition on the Inc. 5000 list, five Telly Awards,



multiple Magellan Awards, and repeated honours in Scuba Diving Magazine's Readers' Choice Awards.

A passionate diver himself, Wayne achieved several prestigious distinctions including Platinum Pro 5000 Diver, Nikon Professional Services Member, SSI Instructor Trainer, and PADI Staff Instructor. His enthusiasm for exploring the world's oceans and wild places helped inspire thousands of travellers to embark on adventures of their own.

Despite his many professional accomplishments and global travels, Wayne's greatest pride and joy was his family. When he was not travelling or diving, he was happiest at home in Augusta, Georgia, spending time with those he loved most, especially his grandchildren, who affectionately knew him as 'Papa', a title he cherished above all others.

Wayne is survived by his beloved wife of 44 years, Dana Dunaway Brown; his son, Justin Brown and his wife Ashley J. Brown and their two children; and his daughter, Ashley Brown Watkins and her husband Cole Watkins and their two children.



Wayne will be remembered as a devoted husband, proud father and grandfather, respected leader, and passionate adventurer whose love for life inspired everyone around him. His legacy of exploration, leadership, and dedication to sharing the world's most extraordinary places will continue to inspire the Aggressor team and travellers worldwide. In keeping with Wayne's wish that 'the show must go on', the team at Aggressor Adventures remains committed to carrying forward the vision he built by delivering exceptional service and unforgettable adventures to guests around the world.

Rork Media Limited Editorial Director Mark Evans said: "Devastated to hear of the passing of Wayne Brown. The news completely blindsided me, and my sincere condolences go out to all of his family members. I always liked the fact that Wayne was a straight shooter, and he didn't beat about the bush – I respected him deeply for his opinion, and he will be sorely missed. But he had a lighter side too, and my last messages to him were chatting about his electric pick up, and his love of its impressive BHP! RIP Wayne." ■

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## DEEP SELECTS TENNESSEE REEF IN FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY FOR VANGUARD DEPLOYMENT

DEEP has announced that Vanguard, its pilot subsea human habitat, will be deployed at Tennessee Reef in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary at a depth of 18m. It will be the first subsea human habitat deployed in the United States in 40 years. Installation is planned for the end of April 2026, weather permitting, as part of a complex marine operation.

First unveiled in Miami in October 2025, Vanguard is now in the final stages of commissioning, including final outfitting, subsystem testing, and integrated acceptance trials.

Norman Smith, Chief Technology Officer at DEEP, said: “Tennessee Reef provides Vanguard with a home in one of the world’s most important marine environments. We couldn’t be more excited to begin this next chapter. Seeing Vanguard deployed and ready to host aquanauts underwater will mark the start of a continuous human presence on the seafloor, in service of science, learning, and ocean stewardship.”

Vanguard is designed to enable up to four crew members to live and work underwater for days at a time, enabling extended time on the seafloor for ocean science, monitoring, and conservation. Vanguard is DEEP’s pilot subsea habitat and a stepping stone to Sentinel, the company’s flagship habitat programme designed to support larger crews on longer underwater missions.

### Why Tennessee Reef

DEEP selected Tennessee Reef based on environmental, operational, and research criteria. The reef lies within a controlled-access conservation area of the sanctuary and is suited to long-term research experiments and seafloor equipment, while ensuring the safety of aquanaut excursions and local recreational activity. The site provides proximity to coral reef systems and access to deeper surrounding waters of scientific interest. A suitable sand patch was identified for deployment, supported by benthic surveys confirming the placement area is free from living coral and other sensitive marine resources.

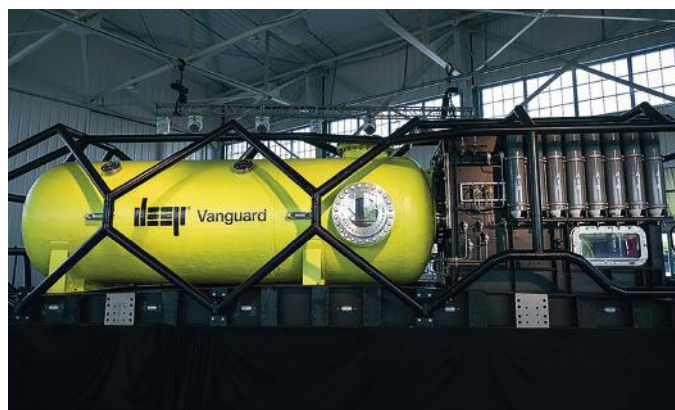
### Main operating base

Vanguard will be operated from DEEP Station Florida (DSF), a shoreside base located in Marathon in the Florida Keys. The main operating base needs to be in proximity to Vanguard’s deployment location to support standard aquanaut evacuation protocol. DSF will also serve as the aquanaut training facility and will house emergency hyperbaric medical equipment.

### Safety and certification

Vanguard is working towards being the first subsea habitat to be classed by DNV, which has provided independent technical oversight from the outset of the project.

Jonathan Struwe, Head of Underwater Technology at DNV Maritime, said: “From the earliest design tests, DEEP worked with us to ensure its systems and materials followed the highest subsea engineering standards. We look forward



to strengthening this partnership as they work towards full DNV class approval of Vanguard.”

### About DEEP

On its mission to make humans aquatic, DEEP is developing subsea systems and habitats to enable a continuous human presence in the ocean.

# INDUSTRY NEWS

## SAS OUT TO BUILD 'WELCOMING' CORNISH DIVE COMMUNITY

After 14 years of building community connections, a Cornwall-based non-profit organisation called Sunshine And Showers (SAS) plans to head under water this spring with a scuba programme aimed at bringing disconnected divers together.



SAS was created in 2012 with the aim of reducing isolation, including for people living with long-term health conditions. Through peer-led groups and organised activities, it provides "safe spaces" where people support one another, build friendships and regain confidence.

Now it has an offshoot called the Cornwall Community Scuba Peer Support Group, based in the south of the county and focusing on shore-diving opportunities. Initially much of the diving will take place from Portmellon near Mevagissey, with pool sessions at Polkyth Leisure Centre in St Austell.

### Midweek options

"The idea grew from a simple observation," says scuba diver Claire Jones, an SAS founder-member and an assistant diving instructor.

"Newly qualified divers often complete their Open Water Diver course full of enthusiasm, only to find themselves without a regular buddy network or accessible midweek diving options," she explains. Midweeks are regarded as important because divers living near the coast are well-placed to take advantage of favourable weather windows as and when they occur.

"Without continuity, confidence dips," says Jones. "Life gets busy, equipment gathers dust. Without ongoing connection, many drift away." The new group represents a "welcoming space" where divers can meet up, explore dive-sites and build their confidence together, with trained shore-cover and medical-support divers available.

The members might be newly qualified divers, those returning after a long break or experienced divers wanting to explore the coastline with like-minded locals. "Above the surface, the coffee and conversation matter just as much as the dive itself," says Jones.

### Training ecosystem

While SAS makes connections it emphasises that it is not a training agency, so group members still have to gain new qualifications through established local dive-centres: "The group complements the local training ecosystem rather than competing with it," explains Jones.

Anyone interested can check out the Sunshine And Showers Facebook page or email: [sunshineandshowersgroup@gmail.com](mailto:sunshineandshowersgroup@gmail.com)

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## THREE MISSING, CAPTAIN HELD AFTER SEYCHELLES LIVEBOARD SINKING

The captain of the dive liveboard Galatea is reported to have remained in police custody since the vessel sank near the island of Marie Louise in the Seychelles Outer Islands in mid-March. Ten people were rescued from the stricken vessel but search operations have continued for three others who remain missing, complicated by the remoteness of the area and open-ocean conditions. Marie Louise, part of the Amirantes island group, lies some 300km south-west of Mahé, where the Galatea had begun its trip.

The incident occurred before dawn on 13 Friday, with reports of a rapid sinking at 5.37am suggesting that catastrophic flooding of the vessel had occurred. The Seychelles' Ministry of Transport stated that all relevant authorities had been immediately engaged, with co-ordinated efforts "to assess the circumstances and ensure appropriate action is taken".

Nine people were able to get clear of the sinking liveboard on a dinghy that succeeded in reaching Desroches island, the main island in the Amirantes, later that day. A 10th person, a Swiss national, was rescued separately later that afternoon, suffering from sun exposure, elevated blood pressure and mild hypothermia. Two of those still missing are also understood to be Swiss guests, along with a Seychellois crew-member. Up to five of the rescued guests are also thought to be from Switzerland. All those rescued have been reported to be in stable condition and to have undergone questioning about the incident following medical evaluation.



### Investigation underway

Law-enforcement authorities have launched an investigation into the circumstances of the sinking. The 61-year-old French captain appeared before the Seychelles Supreme Court on 16 March and was ordered to be remanded for 14 days while those investigations continued. The captain is being held under laws governing commercial conveyance by water in an unsafe or overloaded vessel, and "rash and negligent" actions, but has not been charged.

The Galatea was a 30-metre steel gulet-style sailing and motor yacht that typically operated one-week or shorter diving safaris out of the Seychelles' largest island Mahe for up to 14 guests. It had a dive-tender, a smaller dinghy and two 12-person life-rafts.

## FREEDIVER MARIČIĆ SQUAT-LIFTS 300KG IN LATEST RECORD BID

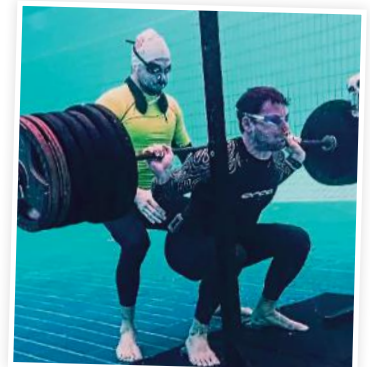
First he held his breath for 29 minutes after breathing pure oxygen last year – now Croatian freediver Vitomir Maričić is claiming another 'don't-try-this-kids' Guinness World Record (GWR) with a feat that took far less time to accomplish – a 300kg underwater squat-lift. The stunt was carried out at the bottom of a covered outdoor swimming pool in Croatia. Maričić was able to increase his lift from an initial 220kg through 260kg to the eventual 300kg-weighted barbell, describing it as "an achievement far tougher than it looks". The freediver undertakes regular weight-training on dry land, although 210kg is his usual limit. The laws of physics mean that a weight under water is effectively a lighter load to lift, although other elements, including drag, balance and the breath-hold itself provide additional challenges.

### Physical challenges

In air, a lifter feels the full mass of a weight but under water buoyant force makes this seem less. In a pool a 300kg steel barbell would have an apparent weight reduction of up to 40kg and feel up to 15% lighter. Buoyancy reduction depends only on displaced volume so does not increase with depth once the weights are submerged, whether the

lift is performed at 2m or 5m. However, because movement through water is slowed by drag, the lifter has to generate force against the water as well as lifting the object, while the slower movements call for better control and stability.

Breath-holding at the same time, and the effects of depth on balance and lung function can also make the act of lifting more demanding on the body.



### World records

Maričić's much-discussed underwater static breath-hold of 29min 3sec after breathing oxygen was achieved in June last year, as reported on Divernet.

Aiming for recognition of his latest feat by GWR as the world's heaviest underwater squat-lift, the attempt was reportedly carried out subject to official requirements, though it has yet to be ratified. A delay is standard when a GWR adjudicator is not present at the event.

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## Ask DAN

DAN medical specialists and researchers answer your dive medicine questions

**Q: I am a recently certified diver and have just completed my first dive trip. After completing my dives, I noticed what looked like a bright red patch of blood over the white of my eye. When I asked my instructor about it, he said it was probably due to mask squeeze. How does mask squeeze cause me to get a blood spot on my eye, and can this be a serious condition? What is the treatment for mask squeeze? Should I be concerned if this happens again?**

A: Although you may look like you've been badly injured, mask squeeze is usually not serious.

**Q: What is mask squeeze?**

A: Like the air spaces in your sinuses and ears, you must also equalise the air space in your mask as you descend. When you descend, failure to equalise, or add air to the air space in the mask, by exhaling through your nose can create unequal pressure between the mask air space and the vascular pressure within the blood vessels of the face. This can result in various degrees of facial barotrauma, or injury to the soft tissues of your face contained within the mask. Imagine your face in a suction cup. The soft tissues beneath the mask and especially around the eye swell and discolour, such as redness or bruising.

**Q: What treatment do I need?**

A: Unless you are experiencing eye pain or visual problems, there is no treatment for facial barotrauma except time. Because it is a bruise, your body will eventually reabsorb the effect of your mask squeeze. Your physician or an eye specialist should address eye pain or visual disturbances such as blurred vision or loss of part of the visual field immediately. These symptoms would be extremely rare in mask squeeze, however. The signs and symptoms of mask squeeze can take up to two weeks or more to resolve. Unfortunately, it is one of those conditions where you will probably look worse than you'd like before it gets better. Not only will blood and oedema need to be reabsorbed, but it tends to be gravity-dependent, which means it will spread downward on your face.

**Q: Who gets mask squeeze?**

A: Mostly new divers get squeezed - they tend to be overwhelmed by all the skills they need to remember, such as buoyancy control and equalising their ears and sinuses. More-



experienced divers tend to have mask squeeze when they are concentrating on some new activity or focused on a task that diverts their attention from clearing their mask. Changing to a new mask or to a low-volume mask may also lead to mask squeeze, because the diver may not be accustomed to when to add air. Finally, poor-fitting masks or other issues such as facial hair may lead to problems with equalising.

**Q: How do you prevent a squeeze from happening again?**

A: The solution to preventing mask squeeze is to remember to keep your nasal passageways open during descent. By exhaling through your nose and using a properly fitted mask, you will minimise the risk of facial barotrauma. A mask should fit comfortably against your face and you should be able to achieve an appropriate seal by gently placing the mask on your face and inhaling through your nose. The mask should seal to your face and not fall off even without the mask strap in place. It is not unusual for a small amount of leakage to occur while diving, especially if you have facial hair. Exhaling through your nose and tilting your face towards the surface while cracking the lower seal of the mask will generally remove any unwanted water from your mask.

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“ Dive sites in the Forgotten Islands are in the Banda Sea and are particularly noticeable for the crystal-clear blue sea, deep walls and huge sponges. The stunning walls of the Banda Sea are beautiful and healthy due to the isolation of these areas ”



# PART TWO

# All aboard the **ARENUI**

The Arenui boutique liveaboard is one of the most-luxurious diving vessels plying the waters of our blue planet, and it offers a spectacular array of diverse itineraries taking in Indonesia's diving hotspots, as well as some relatively unknown gems

Photographs by Arenui Boutique Liveaboard

**A**side from the well-known diving around Komodo and Raja Ampat, the Arenui also specialises in heading to more-remote areas, many of which are overlooked by other diving operations yet yield fantastic diving for those with an adventurous spirit.

### Alor and Flores

Other itineraries include one centring on Alor; and Selayar and Taka Bonerate, which goes up from near Alor towards South Sulawesi. As well as being one of the best-kept secrets for diving in paradise, including rare finds like the beautiful rhinopias, but also plenty of pelagic action, this area boasts stunning topside scenery and impressive volcanoes.

Cruises in Alor and Flores offer widespread muck diving, sharks and large schools of fish, untouched reefs and unexplored coral gardens, magnificent soft corals and stunning hard coral formations. The Arenui also visits the famous Pura Island villagers, who splash out of their wooden dugout canoes and dive underwater with home-made goggles fashioned from wood and glass bottles.

Located in a highly volcanic region, it's no surprise that the scenery is superb and dramatic but sailing through these remote waters also brings you face-to-face with one of the country's most-active volcanoes. It erupts every 30 minutes

and makes for fantastic photographic opportunities, as you take a relaxing break from the fascinating underwater world.

Most cruises that cover the Alor or Flores area start or end at the post of Maumere, on the northern coast of east Flores island. This region is home to a world record, established when a scientific expedition recorded 1,200 species of fish, including some new to science, all found in Maumere Bay alone!

Take time out of diving for some land excursions here; trekking through the park to find 'Varanus Riungensis', another giant lizard, slightly smaller and brighter than its cousin on Komodo. Another unmissable land tour is a visit to the traditional village of Bena, where the population has maintained their original way of life, preserving their buildings (such as megalithic tombs) in keeping with their ancient customs.

### The Forgotten Islands

For itineraries offering something different, check out the Central Forgotten Islands, which explores the southeastern cluster of islands; Southern Forgotten Islands, which takes in the chain of islands running from Alor into the heart of the Forgotten Islands; the Forgotten Islands and Triton Bay, which heads the other direction, northeast; and the North Forgotten Islands, which heads up towards Maluku and the Spice Islands. Diving in the Forgotten Islands, you can expect to find plenty of rare and unusual critters and stunning corals, but you will also have fantastic opportunities for pelagic sightings and schools of larger fish, such as barracuda and mackerel, as well as the chance to meet schooling hammerhead sharks.

Dive sites in the Forgotten Islands are in the Banda Sea and are particularly noticeable for the crystal-clear blue sea, deep walls and huge sponges. The stunning walls of the ▶



The reefs teem with marine life

### *Did you know?*

The Arenui also offers two trips that take in the island of Borneo - there is Best of Borneo and West Sulawesi, which takes in two very different islands during its trip; and Best of Borneo, which does a route covering all the hotspots on the northeast coast of Borneo.

Banda Sea are beautiful and healthy due to the isolation of these areas. The sunlight in the shallows of the dive sites light up the dancing anthias that really look like someone is throwing up ‘confetti fish’.

Dawera Island is a definite stop on a Forgotten Islands itinerary. As well as the diving guests can visit the isolated tropical island village nestled on a beautiful white sand beach and sheltered by a line of palm trees and a bamboo forest. There is a seamount off this isolated island, which the Arenui team counts as one of the best dive sites in the world! The local villages don’t even fish there because they can catch all that they need from the surrounding area. It has hardly been dived either, hence an immaculate, untouched reef so full of fish you don’t know where to look. On the current side the entire reef is covered with pyramid butterflyfish and when they mix in with the hundreds of neon fusiliers and surgeonfish, the colourful effect is striking. There’s a resident school of thousands of big-eyed trevallies that zoom back and forth across the dive site. A big school of batfish also make this pinnacle their home. Whitetip reef sharks, eagle rays, grey reef sharks and, most excitingly, silvertip reef sharks can be spotted here.

The Forgotten Islands are fast becoming famous for the schooling and individual hammerhead sharks that can be seen there. There are several areas where the sharks have been seen – at Dusborgh, Nil Desparandum, Manuk and in the Banda Islands. Dusborgh and Nil Desparadum are seamounts far from any islands and are surrounded by very deep water. Manuk is the most-eastern volcano in Indonesia. Here sea snakes are abundant and very curious. Diving here you will soon get used to the snakes coming at you from all directions to take a sniff at your fins, or even your face! Manuk attracts frigates and brown- and red-footed boobies, so surface intervals can be spent watching these birds souring above the volcano.



Anemonefish

Always a very popular land excursion with guests is the tour of Banda Neira in the Spice Islands. You will visit the Banda Islands during the North Forgotten Islands cruise. Disembarking by the old colonial balustrades of the seafront hotel, you feel that you have stepped back in time. The clean, quiet streets of Banda Neira are a pleasure to stroll around. The quaint little museum is the first stop on the tour and an old diving helmet is one of the other artefacts on show there. A short stroll up the hill takes you to the old Dutch fort with wonderful views over the harbour and to the neighbouring volcano. The town is so peaceful and undeveloped that it feels like the view really hasn’t changed in centuries.

Back down the hill on the other side and through a nutmeg plantation, your guide will demonstrate how to pick the ripe nutmegs. With the clove and cinnamon trees, the fresh smell of spices assails your nose. The final stop on the tour is at the plantation owner’s house for a mid-morning snack of cinnamon tea and nutmeg cake and jam under the shade of the cocoa tree. ▶

## The Arenui level of service

The Arenui's slogan, 'The Boutique Liveaboard', expresses the team's vision of providing the highest quality in everything they do – from diving to dining, from leisure activities to the exquisite accommodations – and, above all, providing outstanding service at all times to their guests.

As an example of this philosophy, the crew offer guests the choice of both comfortable indoor and outdoor areas for relaxing and dining. During meals, there is always an extensive selection of dishes, and a tantalizing list of fine wines. The food is plentiful, fresh, and centred on local and flown-in ingredients. Arenui's internationally trained chefs add their own touch of magic, drawing inspiration from local and international cuisine. In addition to mouth-watering buffet spreads, they also offer a-la-carte choices with daily menu changes.

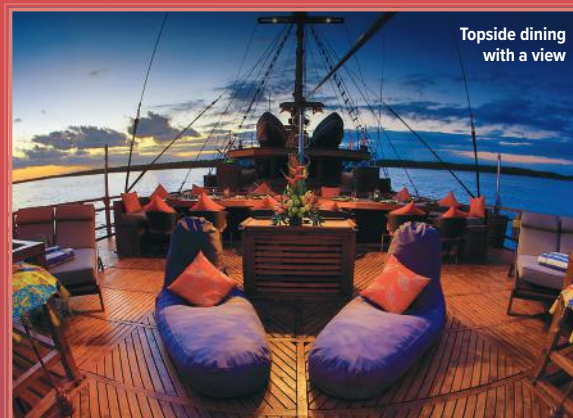
When resting in between dives, guests also have the possibility of indulging themselves in a relaxing massage on deck. Make the most of your non-diving time and indulge yourself! The team have included a full range of massage and spa treatments on the Arenui with exactly this in mind. You'll even have a choice of location to enjoy your luxury treatment; relax in seclusion under the Spa Tent, or why not 'be at one with the elements' out on the deck where you can listen to the tranquil sounds of the sea splashing on the hull.

For those who are looking for simpler pleasures, there are also deck chairs and sun loungers on the sundeck as well as in the outdoor lounge. The team recommends taking some time to lie back and soak up some rays, or sip a cocktail, while watching the sun descend below the horizon across the calm waters of the Indonesian archipelago. A variety of other activities are also available to help you forget all your cares and revitalize your body, mind and spirit, such as two-person kayaking, visits to local villages, and trekking across the island wilderness.

Given the stunning dive sites and topside landscapes, Indonesia is a photographers' dream destination. Arenui is well prepared to host photographers and their assortment of gear, with charging stations for all their equipment, extension cords and adaptors to cater to different systems, and plenty of table space for using their own laptops.

The Arenui crew aim to offer a truly exceptional service to all on-board, and in this respect, they believe that individual service with a personal touch makes all the difference. This personalized service, and the attention given to even the minute details of all aspects of the operations, are what differentiate the Arenui from conventional liveaboards.

[www.arenui.com](http://www.arenui.com)



Topside dining with a view



Twin share cabin



The food presentation is exceptional

“ The Arenui also visits the famous Pura Island villagers, who splash out of their wooden dugout canoes and dive underwater with home-made goggles fashioned from wood and glass bottles ”



Indonesia is not greatly affected by seasons that prohibit diving, so instead it is more important to factor in the weather and the calmness of the seas in terms of enjoying the crossings, when planning a trip to this remote archipelago. There are usually calmer seas between September and November, so Arenui's cruises are scheduled to fit within this window. Any earlier in the year can be affected by strong winds, but then any later into December or the early months of the year can be prone to monsoons and the rainy season.

### Maluku and the Spice Islands

A little further north, there are a selection of itineraries around Maluku and the Spice Islands, and Halmahera. These include Halmahera to Misool to Banda, which sweeps around the island of Seram.

Unlike other areas, with high populations and subsequent pressure from fishing, the Bandas' relatively small human population has been a blessing for divers – offering a vibrant, healthy reef system with fish life in incredible numbers along with huge gorgonians and sponges and some truly monumental hard corals. Expect plenty of pelagics, widespread muck diving and unexplored coral gardens, as well as a rich colonial heritage on land.

Cruises that take in the Banda Sea often start or end at the famous port of Ambon, offering the chance to dive with the unusual critters of Ambon Bay. Ambon is roughly 830 nautical miles north-east of Bali, situated within the Maluku Islands archipelago (sometimes seen labelled as the Moluccas or the Spice Islands). Ambon Island lies off the south-west coast of the much-larger Seram Island and consists of two territories – Maluku Tengah, and the main city and port of Ambon, which is also the capital of Maluku province.

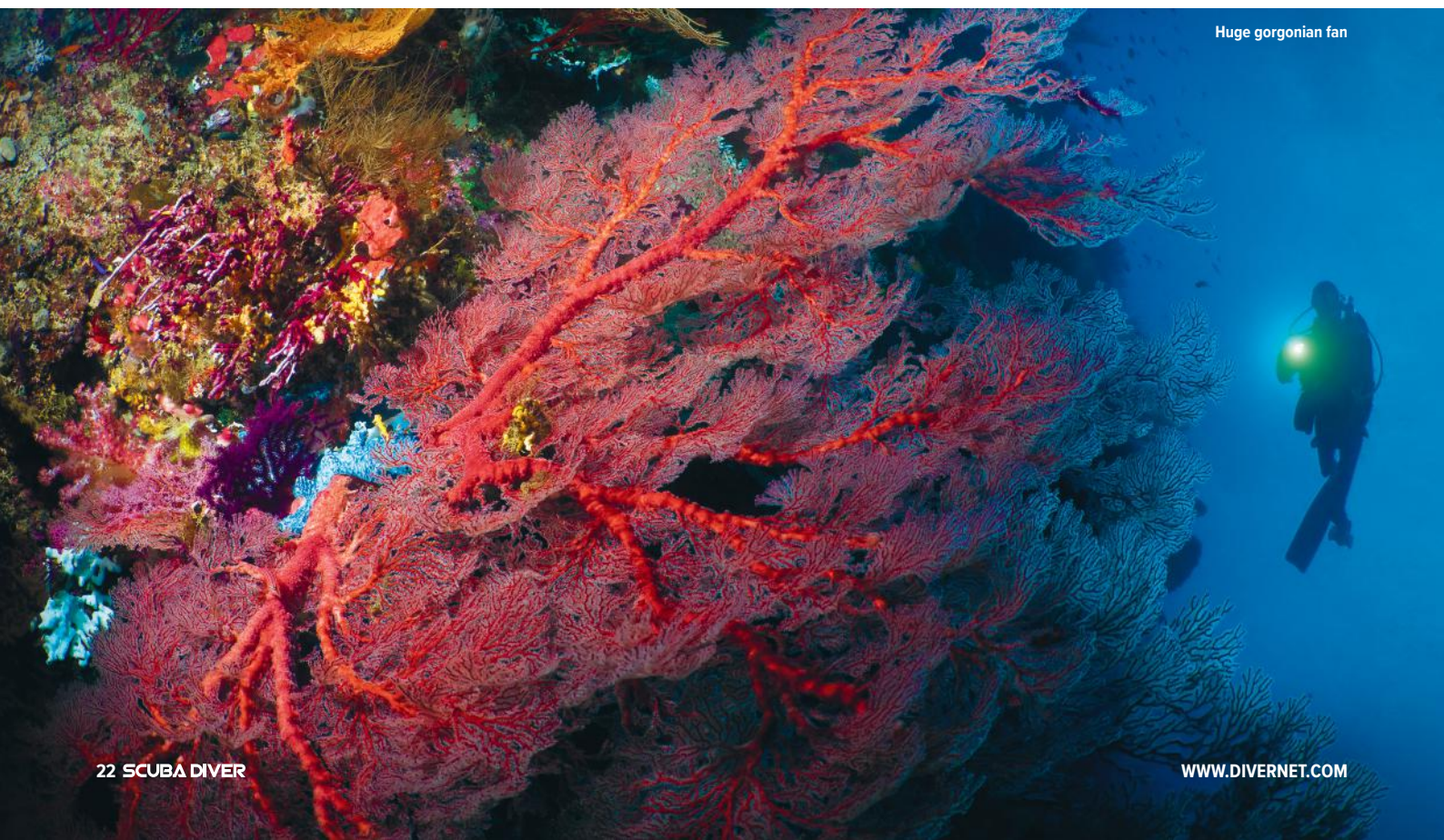
Diving in Ambon Bay is at the top of most people's to-dive list. The Laha sites are a hidden treasure of amazing critters, including the recently discovered species of frogfish (the psychedelic frogfish) but also rhinopias, mimic ▶



Whale shark



Coleman shrimp on a fire urchin



Huge gorgonian fan



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Manta ray



octopus, zebra crabs and dozens of different nudibranch species. A very popular find is the eponymous Ambon scorpionfish in differing hues of red, pink, green, yellow and orange. Keep an eye out for many other members of the scorpionfish family too, including the spiny devilfish, stonefish, zebra lionfish, ragged-finned lionfish and leafy scorpionfish – all venomous, but gorgeous! For those who want a change from nosing around after tiny creatures, a shipwreck covered in deep pink and purple soft corals offers a great alternative and is an irresistible lure for the profuse amount of fish in the area.

The Banda Islands are most widely known as one of the main stops along the old spice route. The remoteness of these islands, in the midst of the wide expanses of the Banda Sea, has given it a fascinating, colourful history, including the fact that it was once a home to exiles of all sorts. The Banda Islands themselves are also renowned for presenting picture-perfect views topside.

These rarely visited seas claim some of the world's richest marine environments, making them a macro-lover's paradise due to the number of rare and new species found here, but the region is still home to many pelagics and schooling fish.

A very popular dive area is found at Nusa Laut, which showcases the positive effects of a village taking care of its habitat, where the reef remains as unspoiled as it was hundreds of years ago and a favourite of many dive enthusiasts. We also visit Hukurila Cave, to experience a dive site located underneath two rock arches. These natural formations can be seen from the surface and lead to a swim-through covered in sponges and soft corals, making for a great descent into your dive. This site is quite an unusual dive, offering the thrill of making your way through twisting passages and caverns and canyons swarming with life.

One of the major highlights for this trip is the island of Manuk, which offers delights above and below. Topside, it is possible to revel in the spectacle of thousands of seabirds, including comical yet beautiful frigate birds and boobies. The sight is unforgettable. One of the few phenomena able to rival that display is the vision of a dozen sea snakes undulating and swimming underwater. Some divers have even been lucky enough to watch them hunting in a pack. It is thought that the warm geothermal vents present in these waters attract these cold-blooded creatures in large numbers. ■

Over and under shot



Pink dorid nudibranch



Hairy frogfish



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# SCUBA DIVER Q&A

## KIRSTY ANDREWS

We chat to the acclaimed, multi-award-winning underwater photographer about her passion for British diving, her amazing octopus interactions, and 'that' unexpected encounter with a great white shark off the coast of South Africa.

Photographs courtesy of Kirsty Andrews



Octopus action off the South Coast



Vibrant reefs in Raja Ampat

**Q: As we always do with these Questions and Answer sessions, how did you first get into scuba diving?**

A: A bit of a stereotype, I learned in Koh Tao in Thailand when I was 18, a month of travel before university. So I'm originally PADI trained. I converted to BSAC at university, where diving and the club became a really big part of my life.

**Q: You are best known as an underwater photographer – when did you first start taking photos on your dives?**

A: Actually not for several years. I worked a season as a dive guide after university and had a compact in my pocket then for occasional 'pointing and shooting', but I didn't start taking photography seriously until I moved back home to Southwest England, joined the Bristol Underwater Photography Group and was inspired by the many talented photographers there. I picked up a second-hand housing at a dive show and never looked back. That was over a decade ago now - time flies when you have such an absorbing hobby.

**Q: You have won multiple awards for your underwater imagery, with a lot of those winning shots coming from around the UK. What is it about our native waters that continually draws you back?**

A: It's a combination of factors. I'm a passionate advocate of UK diving and I use my photography to try to show how



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Cuttlefish



“ The Coral Triangle is impossible to ignore. Indonesia for the biodiversity, the weird and wonderful creatures of Lembeh Strait, the blackwater enticements there and also in the Philippines ”



Nudibranchs test macro skills

wonderful, and sometimes surprising, our seas and our UK marine wildlife can be. I feel my photography benefits from really getting to know the place and the subjects I'm shooting, and where better to do that than my local patch. I enjoy the extra technical challenges of shooting in particle-rich, relatively cold, waters. And there just aren't as many shooters in the UK so maybe I can surprise people with a subject, behaviour or scene they haven't seen before.

**Q: Just last year you enjoyed some amazing interactions with octopus during the summer 'bloom' off the South Coast. Describe what that was like.**

A: It was such an incredible year. I went from having seen maybe a handful of common octopus in UK waters over a decade, to regularly seeing a dozen every dive. There were a few weeks when they were really active, with some special interactions, and then towards the late summer I ▶

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Jer Walky, Dive Factory  
Belgium

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Divers up close with a great white shark



Octopus with eggs



Playful seal

was monitoring several dens with hundreds of thousands of developing eggs. It was so special - and bittersweet as their lives are so short (one- to two-years for this species).

**Q: As well as diving here in the UK, you have also travelled extensively. Where are some of your favourite locations in warmer waters?**

A: The Coral Triangle is impossible to ignore. Indonesia for the biodiversity, the weird and wonderful creatures of Lembeh Strait, the blackwater enticements there and also in the Philippines. Egypt provides the best coral reefs within a relatively short distance of the UK and I recently returned there for some winter sunshine. I'd like to do more cold-water diving abroad; to get back to Vancouver Island and dive the kelp forests of California or Cape Town.

**Q: Your unexpected encounter with a great white shark while on a dive off Aliwal Shoals in South Africa made the headlines. Tell us what that moment was like when you realised what it was.**

A: As it always seems to be for this type of tale, it was our last dive of the trip, and we were swimming along the edge of the reef when we saw at first a shark-shaped shadow, that just got bigger and bigger. At some point we realised it could only be one species - and to be a fully grown five-metre adult female, approaching us with relaxed curiosity - I think I was holding my breath for most of the encounter, just in wonder (and hoping she'd come close enough for a picture, which she did). I was in absolute awe, amazement and delight.

**Q: What is your most-memorable diving experience?**

A: Other than being within touching distance of a great white shark, you mean? I'm lucky enough to have several that spring to mind. My first dive in Raja Ampat was very ▶



## CUSTOMER TESTIMONIAL

“ I find the simplicity and robustness reassuring, knowing that I can take my Kubi's and know they'll get me through the toughest dive trips ”

Patrick Ridley, O'Three  
United Kingdom

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Cuttlefish displaying

Octopus



Curious seal



Fish shoals can make for dramatic wide-angle shots

emotional; I found myself on this bountiful, beautiful reef, surrounded by schools of fish of all sizes, shapes and colours, with sharks passing by - it felt like the sea as it was meant to be. A scene that is vanishingly rare around the world. I put my camera away for a while, and just enjoyed the moment, which I still vividly remember now.

**Q: On the flipside, what is your worst diving memory?**

A: There've been a few of those too, over the years. One thing I'd say is that time practising rescue skills is never wasted. But my shortest-ever dive attempt was in winter in the Lake District in England - I was within touching distance of my buddy but I could see absolutely nothing except murk,

I had to blindly grab her hand and wrench her thumb into an up position to indicate I had had enough and it was time to surface, four minutes in! We enjoyed moaning about it in the pub afterwards though.

**Q: What does the future hold for Kirsty Andrews?**

A: Lots more diving, I hope! I'm excited to see whether this will be another record-breaking year for South Coast octopus. I've just upgraded my camera so will be cursing a bit, getting used to that.

And I'm making a pilgrimage to one of my favourite Scottish sites next month, hoping for Spring wildlife and interesting behaviour. ■

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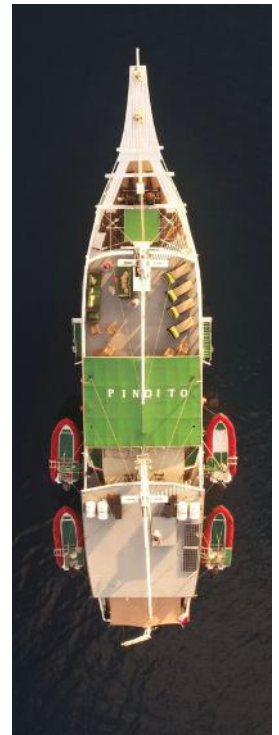
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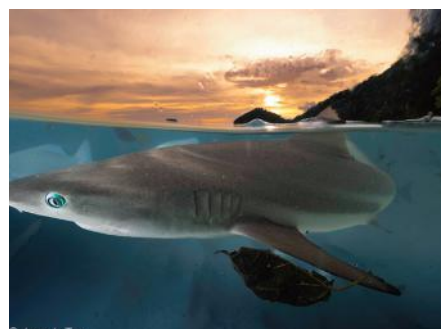


Hi, I am Edi and the team at Pindito. For over 30 years we've been cruising through the Indonesian archipelago - from the pristine beauty of Raja Ampat or the raw nature of the Banda Sea, the wild life in Komodo and everywhere in between.

With just 16 guests on board, 4 dedicated dive tenders (yes, four!) and a full crew of 24 staff on board, we're built for a genuine dive holiday, not a tourist cruise. Our ship is purpose built, our crew long serving and our experience unequalled. Come aboard and experience diving catered to your wishes and ability and enjoy the splendor Pindito and her crew offer you.



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**A**ny fans of Formula One racing will be familiar with Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes race engineer Bono (Chris Bonnington) telling his driver over the radio that it's 'Hammertime', the time in the race for Lewis to unleash a succession of the hottest laps. But in terms of scuba diving, the phrase 'Hammertime' means something very, very different, but no less exciting and rewarding. Here's our story about how we got to experience our version of 'Hammertime'...

Two years ago, in 2023, after the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, we headed to Grand Bahama in search of some specific shark action, having been diverted away from our original plan of travelling to the island Bimini thanks to the chaos that ensued.

Put simply, our dive operator decided to pull out of Bimini due to a combination of things; reduced sightings of great hammerheads at that time (though its' increased again since), coinciding with the operational difficulties of running their trips amidst the pandemic restrictions and uncertainties. Something had to give, and it did.

With our plans having changed, our re-scheduled trip took us to the tiger shark mecca of Tiger Beach off Grand Bahama, where in addition to the 'tigers' themselves, other big shark encounters were entirely possible, including with the great hammerhead. For it was the great hammerhead that was our intended target species, and something at the top of our mutual 'bucket lists'.

Of the other (non-tiger) sharks we encountered at Tiger Beach in 2023, there were Caribbean reef sharks, lemon sharks and bull sharks, but sadly for us, no great hammerheads, including a huge female known as Queen, nor were any other great hammerheads seen during our visit, except by one of the crew who reported seeing a 'non-feeding hammer' from the boat while divers were in the water; nobody glimpsed it. From that time on, it seemed that the 'hammers' had largely stopped visiting Tiger Beach on a regular or reliable basis, even though their absences may not be permanent. Only time will tell.

For us, it was a shame, but it would be churlish to be unhappy about 'only' diving with the tiger sharks, one of the ocean's most-awesome predators. But, to turn our slight negative into a positive, the non-appearances of hammerheads at Tiger Beach had set the scene for a return visit to the Bahamas. We would roll the dice one more time for getting our great hammerhead encounters, and if it was going to happen, it was going to happen in Bimini. Upon returning home, we promptly made a booking with the Bimini-based Neal Watson Scuba Centre for two years' time.

As with most encounters in the world's oceans, success is also about timing, as there's no point turning up at Bimini in, say, July or August expecting to get the sighting. The great hammerhead 'season' starts in November (usually) and ends around mid-April (usually), but it's probably best to go there in the middle of that period of time, around late January/February to put yourself in the ▶



# Hammertime in **BIMINI**

Jeremy and Amanda Cuff finally get to dive with great hammerheads in the clear waters off Bimini, and it more than lives up to the hype

Photographs by Jeremy and Amanda Cuff  
([www.ja-universe.com](http://www.ja-universe.com))

“ The shark action was spectacular and continued pretty much without stop on each dive for the duration of our two-hour stints underwater ”



pound seats, and thus avoid the risk of late arrivals, or early departures of the sharks from the area.

It is thought that they visit the area during this time for a combination of reasons; the abundance of food (such as their favoured prey of stingrays, which are common), and water temperature. There's no sound evidence of mating or giving birth, but it's possible; at least one of the females we would encounter was heavily pregnant. In the summer months, they are known to move North with the rising water temperatures up the East coast of the USA.

So, we travelled out there in February 2025, benefitting from direct flights to the Bahamas from the UK, rather than going via somewhere in Florida, such as Miami. As we'd done two years previously, we chose to spend a couple of nights in Nassau (the Bahamian capital) before travelling over to Bimini on one of the regular internal flights.

Bimini is the westernmost island group in the Bahamas, and is quite remote from the other islands, facing the open sea of the Florida Strait, with Miami and Fort Lauderdale about 50 plus miles away across the water. In fact, some Floridian visitors even come across to Bimini on day trips by either plane or ferry.

Over on Bimini, the Neal Watson team are based at the Bimini Big Game Club, a well set-up but informal resort inhabited mostly by divers, fishermen and other assorted 'sea dogs'. It's got decent accommodation, a bar and



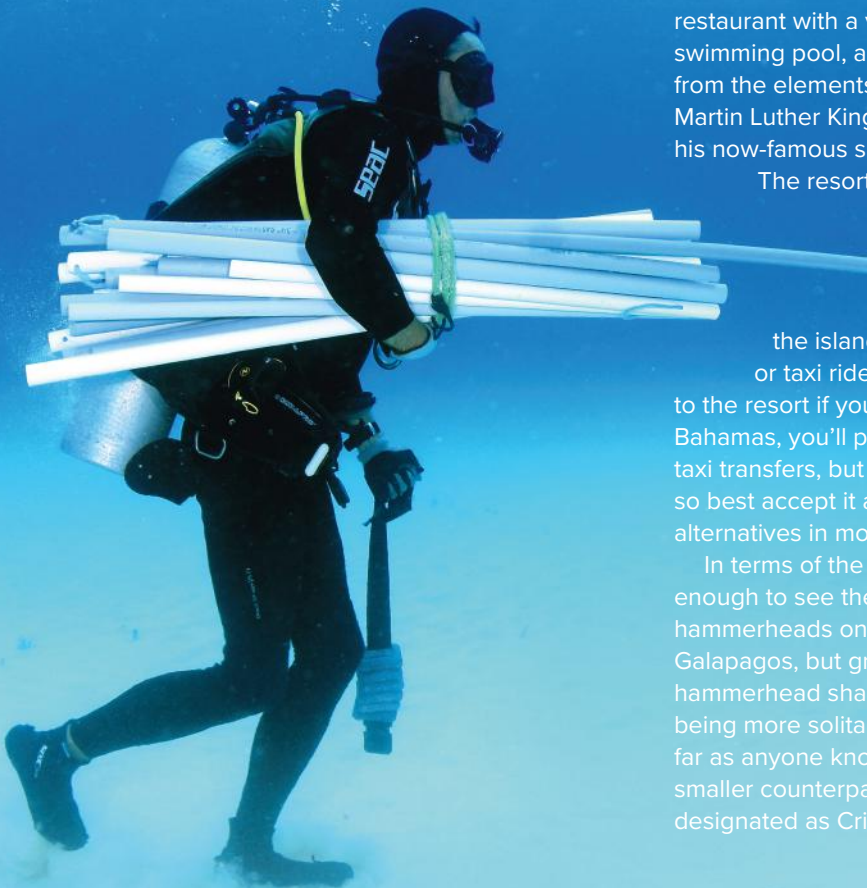
Dive boat ready to depart



Great hammerhead cruises over watching divers

“ ...using the supplied plastic poles (one per diver) to prevent a hammerhead swimming between divers. They're also helpful for stabilising yourself against any current that may be present ”

Heading to work...



restaurant with a view over the lagoon and mangroves, a swimming pool, a shop, and a marina that shelters boats from the elements. It also has the distinction of once hosting Martin Luther King as a guest in 1964, who reputedly honed his now-famous speech during his stay there.

The resort and dive centre are located on North Bimini, whereas the airport is on South Bimini. To get from the airport to the resort involves a minibus ride followed by a short ferry ride between the islands, followed by another (short) minibus or taxi ride, though you could walk the last stint to the resort if your baggage is minimal (unlike us). In the Bahamas, you'll pay rather a lot for minibuses, ferries and taxi transfers, but there's not much you can do about it, so best accept it and go with the flow. There aren't many alternatives in most cases.

In terms of the diving itself, we'd already been fortunate enough to see the spectacle of schooling scalloped hammerheads on dives around Darwin Island in the Galapagos, but great hammerheads (the largest of all the hammerhead shark species) are a different proposition, being more solitary, rarely encountered on dives, and so far as anyone knows, not known to form schools like their smaller counterparts. Added to that, they're now sadly designated as Critically Endangered.



### Did you know?

The Bimini Shark Lab has identified over 60 individual hammerheads, with some named, such as Atlas, Gaia, and Nemesis.



### A word about the bull sharks

Anyone arriving on the harbourside next to the dive centre will quickly be taken aback by the sharks hanging around in the shallows where the dive boats are moored.

There's usually a gaggle of nurse sharks, including one called 'Squiggles' named after its crooked tail that was once broken in some 'incident', but it's the bull sharks that take you aback; they're huge, and there's perhaps eight to ten individuals looking for opportunities. This isn't a place to fall into the water after too many rums at the bar, as the sharks congregate there for the reasons of food.

Over the years, the dive centre developed a 'side hustle' of offering cage dives with them; basically, a dive centre employee feeds them to keep them near the cage while the participant is inside. The air supply is surface fed and it's 20 minutes in duration. I did it, and thought it worthwhile.

You will also have high probabilities of seeing bull sharks at the great hammerhead feeds (we did), though the dive crew won't allow them too close to the feed to avoid it becoming a bull shark dive rather than a great hammerhead dive. If any come too close, the crew chase them off, literally.



Great hammerhead



The famed 'hammerhead' signal



Nurse sharks gather on the seabed

Given our previous lack of success in encountering the great hammerheads at Tiger Beach, we left nothing to chance, booking six solid days of great hammerhead diving (which the Neal Watson team call the 'Great Hammerhead Safari'), even though the other diving offered there is reputedly good. We didn't want our goal to be thwarted this time, whether by non-appearances or unhelpful weather events resulting in cancellation (which can happen). We gave ourselves the best possible chance.

The location for the Hammerhead Safari dives is a short boat ride out of the lagoon, to a shallow sandy area off the Western side of South Bimini. As this area faces the open

waters of the Florida Strait, swells are possible, so it's worth taking sea sickness tablets as a precaution, especially if you have a long stint before getting in the water, while waiting for sharks.

The dives themselves are a continuous two-hour immersion in around 8m-10m of water throughout which the sharks are continually baited and fed. Each diver has the use of two tanks, which can be changed by going up to the boat at any time during the two hours, unless of course, you can eke out a tank for two hours (Amanda managed it, I didn't, so I got 12 logged dives to her six!).

One of quirks of this kind of shark diving (where you need to be firmly planted on the bottom) is the need to be heavily overweighted, which if you've never experienced it before, takes a bit of getting used to. You particularly need to manage your descents, to avoid plummeting at high speed to the bottom and being unable to equalise your ears quickly enough. Ensuring you enter the water with a fully inflated BCD and gradually dumping air is the way to go, combined with using the line to hang onto. It's also important to ensure that your weight belt is done up tightly, as they have a habit of slipping down thanks all the extra lead.

While everything is being set up, the all-important dive briefing is given to all participants, where a member of the dive crew gives a detailed description of what to expect in the water, and what to do if a circumstance arises, such as using the supplied plastic poles (one per diver) to prevent a hammerhead swimming between divers. They're also helpful for stabilising yourself against any current that may be present. For most of the dives on our trip, we had Sean Williams give the briefing; Sean possesses huge knowledge about the area and the sharks themselves, and enjoys sharing it with visiting divers. He's been visiting Bimini for many years including time working at the Bimini Shark Lab (the Bimini Biological Field Station), a conservation and shark research group based on the island.

Once the boat is secured, members of the dive team locate the holed metal bait box in a suitable spot on the sandy expanse, assess the conditions in terms of visibility and current, and then position everyone in a tight semi-circle up-current from the bait box, and safely out of the chum trail (the shark's 'scent highway' to the bait), and wait for sharks to turn up, which usually doesn't take long, though we once waited for an hour. Divers don't get into the water until sharks are present, thus not wasting long periods of the two-hour dive just waiting on the bottom burning through air.

With the briefing done, it's then a case of divers entering the water and finding a spot in the semi-circle (each spot denoted by a plastic pole) and soaking up the action. As with the tiger sharks of Tiger Beach, these dives are a huge

## A special thanks

We'd like to give a special thanks to shark enthusiast and conservationist Sean Williams from the Neal Watson dive team, who kindly gave up his time to share his considerable knowledge about the sharks of Bimini, and especially the great hammerheads. His dream is of a great white being attracted to the shark feed one day. Maybe it'll happen, as the 'ocean is the ocean'...



Feeding a great hammerhead

experience and it's at once awe-inspiring and humbling to see these unique and incredible predators up-close and personal. Most of the 'feeders' (the sharks that participate in the feed) are known to the dive crew and have been given names to aid recognition. Among them are two enormous specimens (both females) measuring over four metres in length such as Queen (the same shark that had also been visiting Tiger Beach) and Gaia. Other sharks we 'met' were Atlas, Aceso, Atalanta, Enyo, Selene, Rhea, Cora, plus a couple of 'new' sharks.

The shark action was spectacular and continued pretty much without stop on each dive for the duration of our two-hour stints underwater (save for an occasional lull). In fact, the season was going well, and on one special day we got 11 different great hammerheads visiting the feeding site, the highest count for the 2024/2025 season from a single dive. After the worrying drop in sightings during the early 2020s, clearly things had swung back in favour of Bimini, even if it was at the expense of other places such as Tiger Beach.

We all know that nothing in the ocean stays the same forever, a truism that applies to the Bahamas as much as anywhere else. Things change, and can change quickly. And they can also change back again. Nothing is 100% certain, nor could it ever be. But for the last 25 years and for now at least, Bimini is absolutely the place to go if you want to dive with the spectacular and rarely encountered great hammerhead shark. There's not really any other place where you can see this species reliably, so make the journey out there. We loved every minute of it, we totally recommend it, and we had experienced our own version of 'Hammertime'... ■

Chunky bull shark



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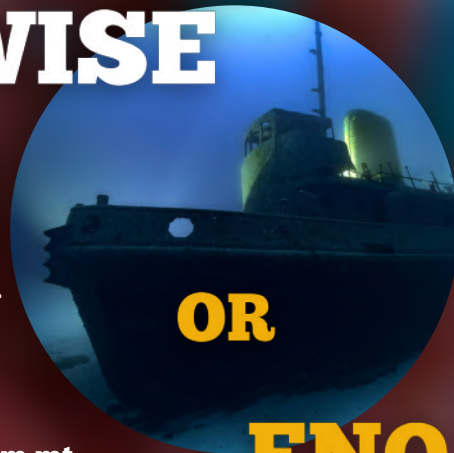
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# Mustard's MASTERCLASS

Alex Mustard turns his attentions to one of the most-instantly recognisable fish in our tropical oceans – the sweetlips

Photographs by Alex Mustard

**S**imultaneously charismatic and handsome, sweetlips are irresistible to underwater photographers. Their oversized, botox lips and confident poses have long made them favourites, yet I've not seen an article dedicated purely to photographing them, so for the 50th instalment of Masterclass, I thought I'd redress the balance.

Sweetlips are found across the reefs of the tropical IndoPacific, and have close relatives, the grunts, living on Caribbean reefs and in the Eastern Pacific. There are about 30 recognised species, but only around a third are the colourful, photogenic standouts that consistently attract our lenses.

There are plenty of reasons sweetlips are treasured subjects. They are among the larger reef fish, yet many species boast the vibrant hues and bold markings more typically associated with smaller reef inhabitants. The ribbon sweetlips of the Coral Triangle, with their sharply defined stripes and lemonyellow fins, are particularly striking. Diagonallined and oriental sweetlips, a fish that forever remind me of the Maldives no matter where I see them, are equally eye-catching. Whereas, the other head-turner, the harlequin sweetlips trades stripes for spots, adorned with dramatic dark blotches over a greenish body.

For us, though, their real charm lies in their behaviour. Sweetlips are nocturnal feeders, spending their days resting on the reef, often in cooperative clusters, as if waiting for their portrait. They gather beneath jetties, around coral heads, and at cleaning stations, and when approached with care, will often hold formation.

Their unhurried daytime nature allows us to perfect our settings, refine compositions, and work angles in a way that few other reef species permit. Few reef fish seem as dedicated to getting a good clean, offering us some standout shooting opportunities.

While sweetlips can be found throughout the IndoPacific, as soon as I think of them, certain dive sites immediately come to mind. Classic sweetlip spots are the Ribbon Reefs of the Great Barrier Reef, the Dampier Strait in Raja Ampat, and numerous

kandus and thilas across the Maldives, all of which are wellknown for delivering photogenic clusters. By contrast, the blackspotted sweetlips of the Red Sea, endemic to that region, rarely gather in the neat formations favoured by their eastern cousins.

Photographically, think of all sweetlips shots as portraits, remembering that eye contact is the foundation of success. Sweetlips have large, soulful eyes (an adaptation to foraging at night) and, combined with their rubbery lips, project plenty of character. However, because their eyes sit on the sides of their head, fronton shots rarely provide satisfying engagement.

Instead, we should aim for more sideon compositions, framing to get a strong connection with one eye, rather than going for both. Often the most-cooperative sweetlips are at cleaning stations and, even if shooting this behaviour wasn't your goal, it inevitably becomes a feature of the shots. When it comes to cleaners, timing is everything. Wait for the peak of the action, with the wrasse actively working or hovering in an aesthetically pleasing position.

Because sweetlips are usually in clear water, I prefer photographing using a longer macro lens and shooting through a little more water to keep the fish comfortable. This underwater telephoto approach, with strobes extended forward to shorten the light path, usually yields the best poses.

The facial features look great in profile and in vertical compositions. That said, species such as ribbon, oriental, and diagonallined sweetlips possess stunning yellow fins that they fan gracefully as they hover. Horizontal frames can capture this motion beautifully, if you time your shots to when the pectoral fins are fully extended.

Sweetlips are compelling subjects, but we turn them into compelling pictures by taking charge of the background. Many shots fail not because of the subject, but because of distractions behind it. Taking a moment to reposition, adjust depth, or frame more carefully makes all the difference whether we are shooting a group or an individual. ▶

Sweetlips love  
being cleaned



A 1/10th of a second exposure is ideal to catch one sweep of the dancing fins



Sweetlips usually look their best when gathered in groups. As with any schooling species, cohesion is key to a strong image. The challenge is approaching closely enough to fill the frame without scattering the formation. I usually find that the fisheye is too wide, and I prefer a wide-angle zoom. This wide, but not too wide, view gives the spectacular view and maintains the neatness of their gatherings. One other tip is to shoot horizontally, rather than up at the sweetlips. An upward angle serves to emphasize pale lips and bellies at the expense of their colourful flanks. When in groups sweetlips constantly jostle for position, and the neat formation one second can be messy the next with one fish going completely the wrong way. Wait for the moment when the formation settles into a pleasing rhythm before pressing the shutter.

Striped species are especially powerful group images because the repetition of pattern amplifies unity within the frame. Ribbon sweetlips often pack together tightly and are among the most dramatic to photograph. Their schools frequently attract interlopers such as snapper or squirrelfish. These can clutter a shot, although when the current aligns the mixed group into a cohesive shape, the result can be visually compelling.

Finally, we have the juveniles. Baby sweetlips look nothing like their parents. Adults are mellow, thicklipped, and sociable; juveniles, by contrast, are solitary, boldly patterned, and hyperactive, performing a constant defensive dance that makes them both enchanting and challenging to capture. The youngsters are usually found in shallow or silty habitats, and often seen on muck dives. Their gyrating dance is a defence mechanism, the motion makes them difficult for predators to target and may be them mimicking poisonous flatworms.

Photographers have long enjoyed capturing this dance, especially with long exposures that emphasise movement. Creating such images requires combining a long exposure with a burst of flash. Use a small aperture and low ISO to balance ambient light during the longer exposure, then rely on the flash to freeze the subject. I find a slow, but not too slow shutter speed of around 1/6th to 1/10th is best. This is long enough for just one undulation and gives the best result. Although rearcurtain sync is often used for motion effects, these young sweetlips move in every direction, so I prefer standard frontcurtain flash, because it means the juvenile is definitely in focus when the flash freezes the action. ■

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**C**rossing the border into Scotland marked a turning point on The Great Scuba Drive. After three weeks of quarries, coves, and cold mornings, we were heading into wilder water - the sea lochs of the west coast. What began as a journey to reach Oban for our HSE Scuba course had become a celebration of UK winter diving in all its rugged beauty.

#### **WEEK 4 – ENTERING INTO SCOTLAND**

##### **Day 20 – Drive Day**

This was a rest day. We crossed into Scotland, dipped briefly back into Northumberland, and took stock. Three weeks, dozens of dives, and a caravan that now doubled as both home and drying room. Today was for catching our breath, editing photos from Capernwray, and planning the dives ahead, hopefully including the Farne Islands.

##### **Day 21 – Beadnell Point, Northumberland**

High winds ruled out the Farnes, so we turned to the shelter of Beadnell Point. The sea was 11 °C, the air colder. Visibility was poor, but the seabed teemed with hermit crabs swapping shells in slow procession. Rico was delighted; he has a soft spot for these tiny recyclers. When a leaking seal forced us to end the dive early, we surfaced cold but content, reminded that sometimes it's the small creatures that steal the show.

##### **Day 22 – Eyemouth, Berwickshire**

Eyemouth was special. Sophie's great-great-grandparents came from here, and it proved a fitting first dive in Scotland. Dropping into a kelp-filled gully between towering cliffs felt like stepping into another world. Lobster, crabs, starfish, and anemones filled every crevice, and an enormous squat lobster stole the spotlight. We drifted through the gully for more than an hour, surfacing exhilarated. Later, a visit to the St Abbs Marine Station reinforced a theme running through our journey, passionate people working to protect and understand the seas that sustain us.

##### **Day 23 – Across Scotland**

The day was spent travelling west through snow-topped hills and mirror-still lochs, stopping at Loch Lomond for breakfast and at the local aquarium to meet April, a rescued Olive Ridley turtle. We particularly enjoyed learning that she was given a bagpipe welcome when she arrived from the Maldives.

##### **Day 24 – Gortain Point, Loch Fyne**

Loch Fyne delivered one of those rare winter gifts - ice on the roadside, sunshine overhead, and water like glass. We entered from a sloping rock ledge that dropped gently to around 3m. Almost immediately, we were surrounded by life - velvet swimming crabs, common sea urchins, barnacles, limpets, and shore crabs. As we reached the sand and gravel loch bed, the colours deepened and the magic really began. All around us was a sea of red - long-clawed squat lobster, common feather stars, and red sea squirts scattered across the bottom. We even spotted a giant hermit crab, the largest either of us had ever seen. The visibility was excellent, around 12–15 metres, and every movement revealed something new. Then during our safety stop, the water around us suddenly turned a shimmering orange and gold. When we surfaced, the reason became clear. The sun was setting, casting deep golden light across the mountains and turning the loch into liquid gold. It was one of those special moments that we won't forget. ▶





Rico Anselmi and Sophie Shields continue their trek through Great Britain, venturing from the North of England into the Lochs of Scotland, and then on to complete their HSE Scuba course in the Sound of Mull

Photographs by Sophie Shields





Conger eel



Goby



Sea urchin



Octopus

“ Dropping into a kelp-filled gully between towering cliffs felt like stepping into another world. Lobster, crabs, starfish, and anemones filled every crevice, and an enormous squat lobster stole the spotlight ”

**Day 25 – Dunoon and Loch Striven**

At Dunoon we met Jason from Wreckspeditions, whose enthusiasm was infectious and generosity outstanding. He guided us on a shore dive at Brackley Point, once used for testing the Dambusters’ ‘bouncing bombs’. The wrecks were bright with anemones and sponges, and a huge conger eel watched from its lair.

In the afternoon we joined Jason aboard his RHIB Starfish Enterprise for a second dive on a small fishing boat wreck. The colours glowed in our torchlight, and when we surfaced, Jason handed us steaming hot chocolates topped with cream and marshmallows - while still in full dive kit. Possibly the best hot drink ever!

**Day 26 – Drishaig Reef, Loch Fyne**

At Drishaig Reef we experienced the strange beauty of a peaty, freshwater layer over clear saltwater. Dropping through the red-brown haze into 12 °C water, we found the reef alive with dogfish, catsharks, prawns, crabs, spiny lobster and blennies. Fine glittering sediment shimmered around us which we later identified as tiny mineral crystals. A dive both eerie and enchanting.

**Day 27 – Conger Alley, Loch Long**

Torrential rain lashed the loch but below it all was calm. We zig-zagged down a steep bank to 24m, where plumose and firework anemones swayed in torchlight. Curious blennies followed us everywhere, and a perfectly camouflaged greater pipefish held its ground among the weeds. Starfish, sponges, scallops and small urchins covered the rocks. We surfaced to relentless rain. It felt like we’d escaped into another world, one where time slowed down and the Scottish winter weather disappeared completely.

**Day 28 – Queenie Reef, Loch Creran**

Our final dive before the HSE course was a fitting finale. Loch Creran, a protected marine area near Oban, is home to Britain’s only living *Serpula vermicularis* reefs. The first few metres were tea-coloured with freshwater, but below, the saltwater cleared to reveal walls completely encrusted with oysters, clams, scallops, anemones, feather stars, brittle stars, urchins, common sunstars and sea squirts. Tiny gobies darted between the starfish and anemones. It was vibrant and full of movement, one of the most colourful and diverse reef systems we have seen on the trip. ▶

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“ Looking back, The Great Scuba Drive was far more than a road trip; it was a celebration of resilience, curiosity, and connection, proof that adventure doesn't need palm trees or tropical reefs ”

Inside the airplane at Capernwray

### Did you know?

The HSE Scuba Diver qualification allows open circuit Scuba Divers in the UK to meet the Approved Code of Practice (ACOP). This is required for any diving activity where payment of any kind is made to the diver.



Rico being congratulated by Mike Morgan on his HSE Scuba pass



The sun setting in another diving day

We surfaced after 81 minutes, our longest dive of the trip. Diving in Loch Creran was a privilege. To witness one of the UK's most-unique marine ecosystems was truly special. It reminded us why we started The Great Scuba Drive - to explore, to learn, and to show that adventure and discovery don't require tropical waters.

### Conclusion

What began as a practical journey north to complete our HSE Scuba course became an unforgettable adventure that redefined how we see British diving. Over 28 days we travelled from the Cornish cliffs to the Scottish lochs, diving in quarries, coves, and harbours, often in freezing water and wild weather, yet finding beauty and warmth in every encounter. We met divers, instructors, scientists, and ocean advocates, each sharing the same quiet passion for the underwater world. The HSE course at Puffin Dive Centre marked the culmination of that journey, pushing us to new limits both physically and mentally. It demanded discipline, professionalism, and teamwork, but also deepened our respect for the diving community and the standards that keep it safe.

Looking back, The Great Scuba Drive was far more than a road trip; it was a celebration of resilience, curiosity, and connection, proof that adventure doesn't need palm trees or tropical reefs. It's here, in our own cold, complex waters, where true stories unfold. As we drove back south,



Sophie on the HSE Scuba course

exhausted but elated, two thoughts stayed with us - the kindness and enthusiasm of the UK dive community is exceptional, and the UK's diving world is as rich and remarkable as any on Earth and we have only just begun to explore it. ■

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AQUA LUNG

The GO Diving Show really hit its stride in 2026, with this year's show absolutely packed over the weekend with enthusiastic divers of all levels of experience and age, numerous families with excited children in tow, and exhibitors feeding off the palpable buzz that filled both halls

Photographs by Jason Brown / Bardo Creative



# Go Diving 2026



**A** mega line-up on the Main Stage was the crowning glory of the GO Diving Show in 2026. TV favourite Steve Backshall was back by popular demand after last year's triumphant return to the event, and the multi-award-winning TV presenter, perhaps best-known for his phenomenally successful *Deadly* series, presented to capacity crowds all weekend, and was swamped wherever he went.

But he was not the only 'big hitter' in 2026. Steve was joined on the Main Stage by commercial diver and supervisor Chris Lemons. Chris was thrust into the spotlight after he miraculously survived being on the seabed some 100m down in the North Sea for 40 minutes after a freak accident cut him off from his surface-supplied gas, light and heat. His extraordinary story was subsequently immortalised in the hit Netflix/BBC documentary *Last Breath*, a version of which was developed into a 2025 Hollywood movie, starring Woody Harrelson, Simu Liu and Finn Cole, and Chris' mesmerising talk was undoubtedly a highlight of the GO Diving Show.

Another new face for 2026 was wildlife biologist, explorer, TV presenter, film-maker and author Lizzie Daly. A real-life female action hero, known for her resilient, adventurous spirit and storytelling mastery, she enthralled the crowds as she did a 'fireside chat' with regular MC Andy Torbet.

Talking of action hero Torbs, as well as keeping the Main Stage running smoothly, he also did a talk about the challenges he faced to do his skydive-to-dive stunt last summer, presented in his own inimitable style.

Last but not least, freediving guru and PADI IDC Staff Instructor Liz Parkinson was a smash hit when she was on the Main Stage a couple of years ago, and we were delighted to welcome her back. Liz is rapidly becoming the go-to person for Hollywood and TV companies when it comes to teaching talent to scuba dive or freedive, or when they need a stunt performer who can excel whether they are on a set of scuba gear or diving breath-hold, and she captivated the audience with behind-the-scenes insights into the likes of James Cameron's *Avatar: The Way of Water*, Marvel's *Wakanda Forever*, and Netflix's mini-series *Thai Cave Rescue*.



The RNLI Shannon and the 'wavy diver' greeted visitors



There were queues to get in both mornings



Lizzie Daly chatting to Andy Torbet



Steve Backshall waxing lyrical about sharks



The aisles were packed with enthusiastic divers



Imperial College London did an interactive talk on the Tech Stage



There were plenty of manufacturers present showcasing new gear



Chris Lemons of Last Breath fame



The VR Zone wreck dive on the Mars



Trying commercial diving gear in the pool

*"The GO Diving Show in the UK sets a new standard by which other dive shows should be judged. From top-quality household name speakers to a vibrant, quality-oriented atmosphere, the show delivered not only excellent opportunities for us as a brand to showcase our newest products, but a huge diversity for the visitors. From the newest of technical diving products to an enormous wealth of travel options, enough to please even the most-adventurous diver, there really was something for everyone. The presentation and organisation of the show was absolutely first class"*

**Jim Standing, Fourth Element**

As well as the Main Stage line-up, the dedicated stages – the UK Stage, the Tech Stage and the Inspiration/Photo Stage – also boasted a fantastic array of speakers, ranging from old favourites like tech gurus Paul Toomer and Mark Powell, underwater photographers Lawson Wood and Anne and Phil Medcalf, to new faces such as snorkel pros Emma and Gordon Taylor, the Great Scuba Drive duo Rico Anselmi and Sophie Shields, underwater archaeologist Duncan Ross, extreme freediver Nick Fazah, and tech experts Barry McGill and Dominic Robinson. It was heartening to see good crowds for all of the smaller stages, even when the likes of Backshall or Lemons were on the Main Stage.

There was also plenty to keep you occupied. As well as the superlative array of speakers over the weekend, there were also a host of interactive features, including an amazing immersive virtual-reality 70m-deep technical dive on the Mars shipwreck that was a firm favourite with all ages; the Nautical Archaeology Society's 'shipwreck' ▶



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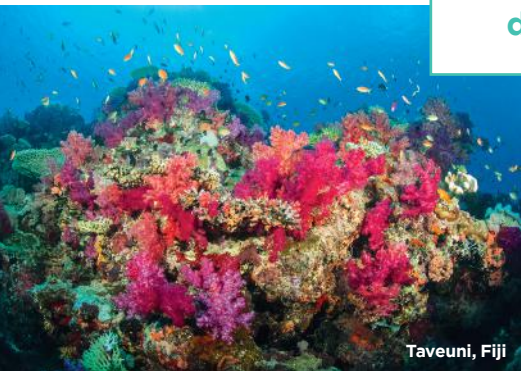
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Both days were busy right up until the doors closed



Eyeballing new equipment



The Nautical Archaeological Society's wreck survey

where you could get hand's on to learn survey techniques; innovative breath-hold workshops involving silent-disco-style headphones with Freediving London, where you could learn how to utilise your diaphragm, control your breathing, focus your minds and reduce your O2 consumption; and the marine biology zone with Just One Ocean, where several interactive displays will showcase some of the work being done to preserve our oceans. New for 2026, there was your chance to take part in research with Imperial College London, which has been conducting various studies into diving – they were busy all weekend. The giant trydive pool was busy all weekend with entry-level trydives, sidemount sessions and CCR experiences, as well as divers getting to grips with commercial diving equipment.

All of these elements were scattered among an ever-increasing array of stands from tourist boards, manufacturers, training agencies, resorts, liveaboards, dive centres, retailers and much more, offering the chance to learn about the latest diving equipment, travel destinations and training opportunities, and do a bit of retail therapy.

We'll be back at the NAEC Stoneleigh on 27-28 February 2027 – mark it on your diary, you do not want to miss what is now a staple of the British diving scene. ▶

## A word from Steve Weinman

**Steve Weinman was involved with the Diver Group events back in its heyday, and he was overjoyed to see the GO Diving Show surpass even these glory days.**

The GO Diving Show truly came of age as this February turned into March, and the numbers of people passing through the doors of the NAEC Stoneleigh near Coventry over the weekend hit just under 16,400.

That is comparable if not more than was recorded in the heyday of the Birmingham Dive Shows that GO Diving has replaced, and puts the modern event firmly in the driving seat as the UK show for existing and would-be scuba divers.

The former Dive Shows were held at the NEC Birmingham towards the end of each UK diving season for many decades, but they had to share visitors with sibling events also run by Diver magazine in London at the start of each season.

Now, held at seemingly the optimal time of year and in the right place, GO Diving has convincingly supplanted both events. The London International Dive Show (LIDS) at ExCel had started struggling and closed in 2014, while the NEC event continued until 2019, when Covid finally saw it off.

It had remained the UK's biggest dive show but against minimal competition, and over the years had increasingly faced the sort of criticism that can dog any long-running event: lack of innovation, cost-cutting, over-emphasis on kit-selling and, especially, pricey car-parking. That last criticism has been neatly set aside at the NAEC Stoneleigh near Coventry, which has around 10,000 free parking spaces.

GO Diving, launched in 2019 after discussions with the dive industry and as the Dive Show was running out of gas, was a relatively modest initiative initially - but it was independent, looked good and represented a brave move in the prevailing atmosphere of cutbacks and scepticism.

It also had to contend with the understandable habit of potential exhibitors waiting to see how their rivals got on before committing themselves, and all this at a time when capital was at a premium. But it was a show that insisted on putting the consumer first.

Not surprisingly its growth was slow in the pandemic and post-Covid era, but the crowded - pleasantly so - aisles in March say everything about the persistence of the GO Diving organisers and the commitment of British divers to turn out in force on damp days several weeks off the start of the season.

These visitors have proved to have a fierce appetite for a range of celebrity diver presentations so generous that it creates dilemmas about where to be in the halls at any particular time. They want to check out the latest dive-kit and explore tempting dive-trip offerings - and they have always relished the opportunity to catch up with dive-buddies.

Those old Dive Show-era problems of trying to blend in-hall speakers and audiences with business being conducted on nearby stands has been largely overcome through accumulated experience. The crowds around the main stage for talks such as that by 'back-from-the-dead' sat diver Chris Lemons looked to be record-breaking in themselves.

It would cheer any scuba diver's heart to see the two halls thronging as they did this year - will even more softly carpeted floorspace be required in future years? ■

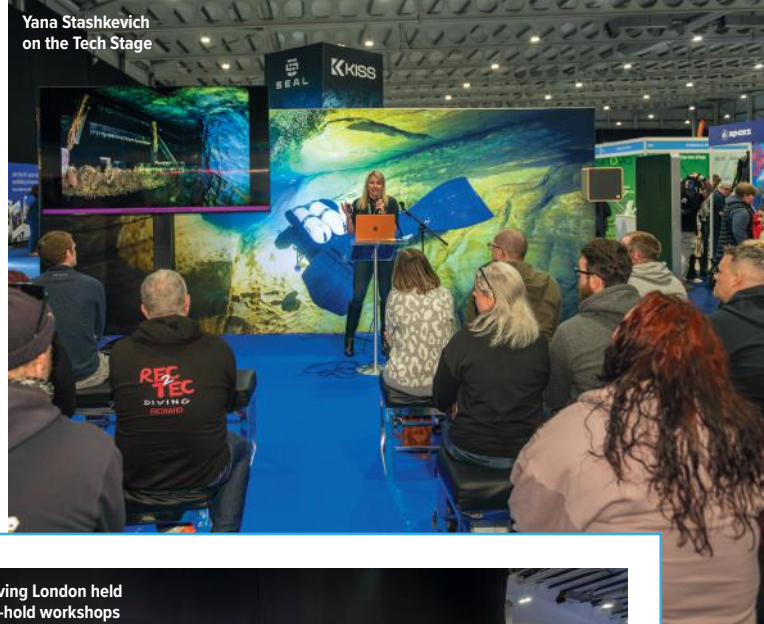


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# #ASKMARK



**#AskMark is our scuba diving Q&A section to answer your scuba diving questions.** Have a burning question about buoyancy control, or big dreams of becoming a Divemaster? Mark Newman, a Pro Diver since 2009, is here to answer your questions and share his expert knowledge – no question is too basic or bizarre! **So, gear up, dive in, and let's #AskMark**

## @michaelapinkavova5488

**#AskMark: Hi Mark, I'm preparing to do IDC, would you have any advice about the course?**

Your Instructor Development Course is a prolonged course that teaches you how to pass the Instructor Examination. My best advice is to write down as little as possible for presentations. You're not going to be reading off an auto-cue; just write down four or five headings as prompts to make sure that you cover everything so you're not tempted to look down while you talk.

For skills, make your actions as large as possible and aimed at the divers in front of you so everybody can see what you're doing. And for the written exam, learn where to find the information more than trying to learn all of the exact information. Trying to learn every student ratio and maximum depth for every course is impossible but, if you know where to find it quickly, you'll save time in the exam.



## @mik14ulic

**#AskMark: How should I orient my swivel turret first stage for a single cylinder dive?**

The first consideration is always hose routing; we want our hoses to route as straight as possible so that the hoses don't bend or kink in the same place frequently. This usually leans towards an upright configuration so the low-pressure hoses can route over your shoulders more easily.

Inverted has its benefits. First, your hoses are more protected in over-head environments like wrecks so that they're less likely to bump and get damaged. And some first stage designs are longer on one side, meaning that you're less likely to bump your head if your first stage is pointing downwards. But my main priority is usually hose routing and keeping hoses as straight as possible.



## @dtt3426

**#AskMark: I went on a max depth of nearly 8m for 65 minutes. My computer still said I had to wait 24 hours? Did I really get that much nitrogen at that depth for that time?**

For most no-decompression algorithms, that profile is still comfortably within ND. Outside of skipping a decompression stop or a rapid ascent, the 24hr warning is most likely warning you not to fly for 24 hours. Most dive computers, as soon as they register a dive, they will activate a no-fly warning, which also counts for climbing to altitude on dry land.

The best way to confirm is to read your computer's manual, which you can usually download for free on the manufacturer's website. Most manuals have a section breaking down warnings and symbols you may see during and after a dive. And until you can confirm what that warning is for, it's best to stay out of the water to be safe.



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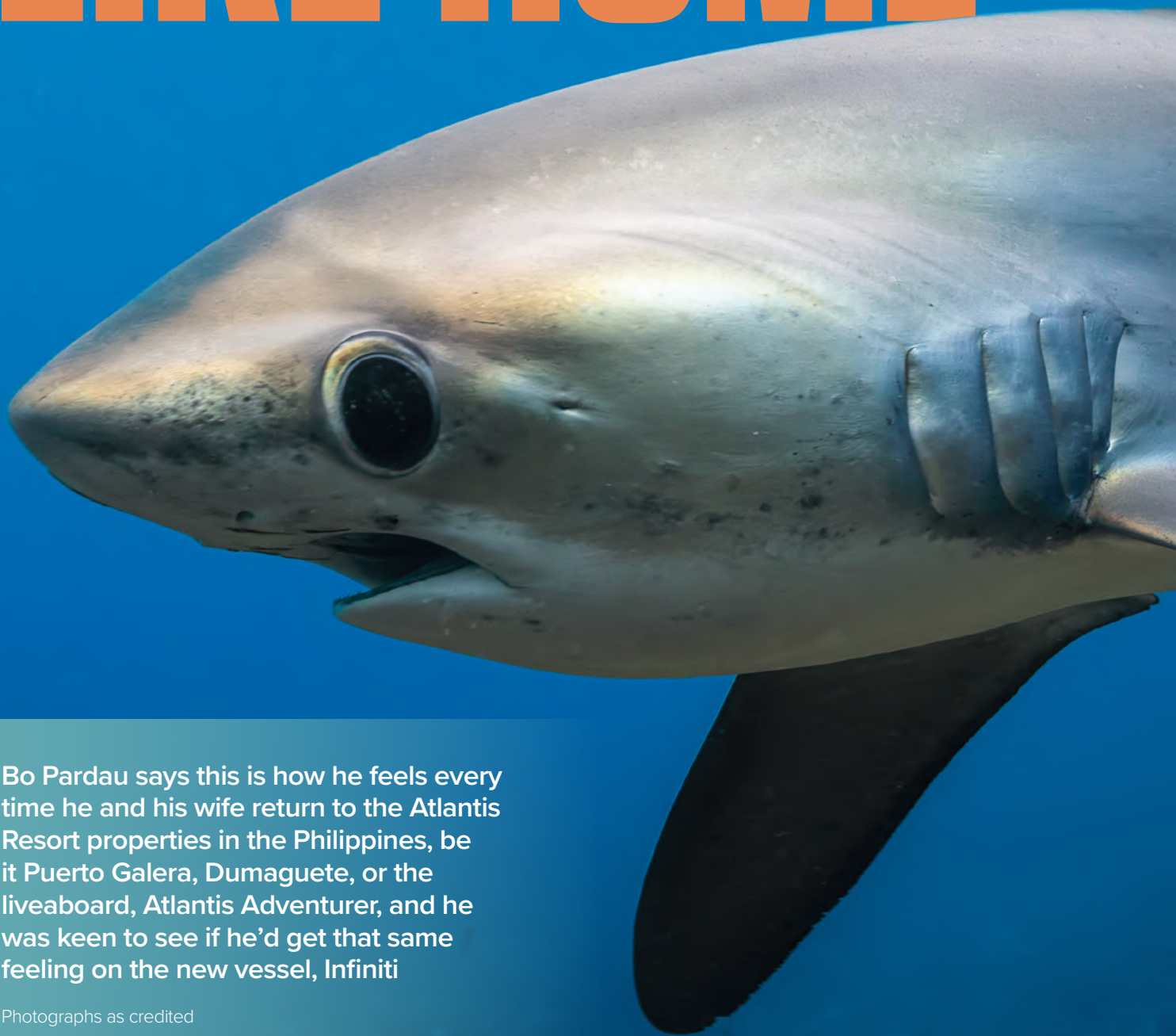
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# 'THERE'S NO LIKE HOME'



Bo Pardau says this is how he feels every time he and his wife return to the Atlantis Resort properties in the Philippines, be it Puerto Galera, Dumaguete, or the liveaboard, Atlantis Adventurer, and he was keen to see if he'd get that same feeling on the new vessel, Infiniti

Photographs as credited

# PLACE

**H**aving stayed at both resorts multiple times since 2010, and experienced the same level of excellence and caring (they all know your name from the first day!) on the Adventurer liveboard at Tubbataha, we were delighted to see that Atlantis had acquired a new boat, the Infiniti. We jumped at the chance to try it out and explore new (to us) dive sites.

The Infiniti currently offers three routes and I was interested in the Visayas North Route that would include a chance to dive with thresher sharks, a long-time bucket list item I wished to fill. As any seasoned traveller knows, it is a risk to anticipate that all air travel will go as planned. If you are at a land-based resort, it is disappointing to miss time at the resort and dives. Missing a liveboard is on the next level of despair, so I would recommend the easy solution of booking a few days in advance at the Atlantis Resort at Dumaguete, where the Infiniti departs from on Visayas routes. You will get the chance to reset your internal clock, enjoy the local ambiance and food, and some of the finest muck dives I have experienced.

There is a good chance of seeing flamboyant cuttlefish, blue ring octopus, mimic octopus, pipefish, shrimp and so many varieties of nudibranchs.

After a couple of final morning dives in Dumaguete, the crew took the guests and our belongings out to the ship to get oriented and settled into our cabins. As we came on board we were greeted by the cruise director, who we first met in 2010 when he was the first dive guide we met at the Atlantis Resort in Puerto Galera.

The Infiniti can take up to 25 guests spread over 11 cabins, all with en-suite baths and wonderfully warm showers. The premium deluxe cabins were roomy with plenty of storage. The rear of the main deck offered ample space for the storage of scuba gear at individual stations. Once your gear was set up, you were done handling it for the week. The Infiniti offers four dives a day, and a night dive as a fifth dive when possible. After your dive, a favourite feature was the roomy swim step, complete with three warm

## *Did you know?*

The Visayas North Route in the Philippines centres on the northern Visayan islands – mainly Panay, Romblon, Masbate, and Cebu, offering a mix of top-tier beach destinations, vibrant festivals and incredible diving opportunities.

## *Did you know?*

Thresher sharks use their long tails to whip and stun fish (like sardines and mackerel) by striking the water, acting as their 'secret weapon'. Their tail can make up to 50% of their total body length. Despite their size and power, they are shy and harmless to humans.

showers and several feet of hanging space, so wetsuits could be removed, dunked in the always-fresh rinse bucket and hung before ever leaving the deck. The wetsuits were in full sun so they were, if not dry, at least warm for the next dive. Stepping up to the main level after a dive, you were greeted with a steaming hot facecloth and your own warm dry towel. After the crew retrieved and dipped your camera you could take it to the camera room, which is roomy with plenty of stations, and storage space for all of your equipment. There was 110v and 220v available at each station.

The main lounge was where most everyone gathered when not diving as there was plenty of good food and drink throughout the day and evening. There were movies that ▶



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A collection of large sea fans make for an excellent photo  
© Simon Lorenz



Colourful nudibranch  
© Bo Pardau



Frogfish  
© Bo Pardau

could be shown on the large screen, but I never saw anyone take advantage of that. True to the Atlantis motto, ‘Come as a guest, leave as a friend’, the first evening was spent getting to know one another - crew and guests - then we all just hung out and told tall tales, typical diver lore. We were all eager to see new places and after travelling through the first night, we woke up at our first dive site full of excitement.

Our first stop was Pamlican Island on the southwest tip of Bohol where we dived Spanish Tower, Pamlican Cliffs, and North and South Haunted Island. There we saw multiple turtles, Sea kraits, nudibranchs, and frogfish among soft, hard, and table corals. This was a great way to start! The second day found us at Anda on the southeastern point of Bohol where the reefs were a mix of steep drop-offs and slopes with incredibly healthy coral reefs teeming with marine life, large and small. At one point there was a large school of jacks passing by and, lucky me, I had my macro lens on.

The third day was spent at Sogod Bay in Southern Leyte. It is more remote than other sites, making diving off a liveaboard ideal. This location mirrored the reefs at Anda with a bit more current. Napantao Marine Sanctuary offered fields of colourful soft corals with large schools of tropical fish like sergeant major. Afternoon dives were in Padre Burgos area, featuring healthy soft corals colonies,

incredible green sun corals and an abundance of orange anthias swimming around. By this point we had settled in to wake up calls of soft music, hot coffee, fresh squeezed juice, yogurt, and cereal for the pre-breakfast knowing that, after the first dive, we would have our pre-ordered hot breakfast served within minutes. Lunch and dinner were buffet style, including different protein selection, an abundant salad bar, bottomless soup tureen and dessert, plus beer, wine, and distilled liquors when your diving was done for the day.

The third evening while we relocated our guide gave us a thorough briefing so we would ▶

“ This ended up being the best wall dives we had on this trip with clear water and a slight current that allowed a slow drift by healthy soft and hard corals, sea fans and crinoids ”



Infiniti moored at Gato Island  
© David F

know what to expect as we would be spending the next morning diving with the thresher sharks at Kimud Shoal. Waking up in the morning, we found ourselves in open ocean with islands in the distance so we could see the advantage of being on a liveaboard. We were the first ones to arrive and we had less than a three-minute zodiac ride to the drop point. The day boats from Malpascua had a least a 45-minute ride so we were able to have our first dive very nearly to ourselves.

The thresher sharks spend the majority of their time at 182m, hence the large sensitive eyes, but in the past would come to Monad Shoal at 30m to be cleaned. Since it is mandatory to photograph using only ambient light, the images in the past were clearly very challenging. Fortunately for us there has been a shift recently as tiger sharks took over the deeper shoal, so now the thresher sharks have moved to Kimud Shoal, which sits at 15m, offering much better lighting.

This dive was incredible! We hovered off the bottom and watched the parade of sharks go by with some very close passes. The guide took us around to a multitude of cleaning stations and also showed us the edge of this sea mount that drops precipitously to over 150m. Back on the *Infiniti* between dives we witnessed the vast armada of dive boats arriving so we knew we would not be alone for the second dive. Fortunately, the guides knew how to spin away from the masses and still spend time with the sharks. It was a memorable morning! That afternoon we dove at Isla Del Gato with vertical walls and undercuts, tunnels, and a number of channels to navigate where we found whitetip reef sharks, sea kraits, frogfish, and cuttlefish.

We spent our fifth day at Malapascua Island, which is primarily muck diving similar to Dumaguete with multiple sightings of seahorses, mantis shrimp, nudibranchs, flatworms, and crabs. We also had a wonderful night dive at Evo Reef that was teeming with life among the flotsam and jetsam. Someone also made a concrete thresher shark that might be five metres long and is quite a site, particularly on a night dive. Back to the boat we are greeted with the hot facecloth, warm dry towel, and hot chocolate (with Baileys upon request).

On day six we travelled a short distance to Capitancillo Island, which is truly a unique site. This is a flat plateau covering about 15 acres that barely rises above the ocean level and supports an 24-metre-tall lighthouse. The legend goes that the island was once a



Diver and batfish  
in Gato Cavern  
© David F.

ship that was cursed because the captain insulted the local chief 400 years ago. This ended up being the best wall dives we had on this trip with clear water and a slight current that allowed a slow drift by healthy soft and hard corals, sea fans and crinoids. We found so many nudibranchs that we would actually let some go by without shooting them. After two memorable dives we prepared for the voyage back to Dumaguete. On our way back we had ample time to dry our gear and reflect on what we had experienced. Diving with the thresher sharks was truly the highlight of the week. Looking back on the trip, as I think of Atlantis Resorts as home, I could consider the *Infiniti* as my new home away from home. ■



Feeding corals  
© Simon Lorenz

### About the author

Bo and his wife, Jamie, started diving in the kelp forests of Northern California in 1990 and, surveying the rich diversity and beauty that few get to see, he resolved to bring images to the surface to share with others. He went on to become a NAUI instructor, moved to Hawaii, and began travelling to dive destinations to advance his photography. While wide angle ambient light photography is his focus, he also enjoys macro and blackwater photography. Having travelled extensively to dive destinations, Atlantis Resorts in the Philippines is still his favourite.



Turtle and sea snake  
cruising the reef  
© David Fleetham

● DUMAGUETE ● APO & CORON ● BOHOL ● TUBBATAHA ●  
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# HIDDEN WORLDS

*The challenges behind  
filming the deep*



**W**hen people watch an underwater documentary, they see calm. What they don't see is what it takes to get that shot. Hidden Worlds looks quiet, almost meditative.

Filming it was anything but. Over several years, I filmed on wrecks in Norway, Croatia and Malin Head, in the Red Sea, and in flooded mines and caves across Germany and Hungary. This was not a big production with teams of divers and camera operators. It was a small set-up - mostly just me filming underwater, supported by my buddy Ingo and the people running the trips. And that changes the way you approach every dive.

### Getting there

Before any dive, there is always the same challenge - getting the gear there. Technical diving and film-making both require equipment. Put them together, and every trip starts to feel like moving a small expedition. Flights to places like Egypt or Norway meant travelling with five large cases. One for the rebreather, one for dive gear - fins, masks, stage regulators, drysuit, reels, spares - and the rest for cameras, housings, lights, audio gear and batteries.

In technical diving, redundancy is a given. That's how we are trained. If something breaks, you're not just ending a dive - you're losing the shot. And often, you don't get a second chance. So you carry spares. You fix things yourself. Or you don't shoot at all. The real uncertainty isn't the weight - that's booked. It's whether everything actually arrives with you. Sometimes cases come later. Sometimes critical parts show up a day or two after you do.

For Malin Head, flying was not even an option. We drove. Not just because of reliability, but because of one key piece of equipment - scooters. Both Ingo and I use scooters extensively when filming. Not as a luxury, but because they make certain shots possible in the first place. If I need to place multiple lights inside a wreck at 70m, 80m or 90m, I don't have time to swim back and forth.

Scooters are extremely difficult to transport by plane and, in most cases, effectively impossible due to battery restrictions. Smaller units can sometimes be taken if they meet airline limits, but the larger scooters we use for filming - especially with camera systems mounted on them - are not something you can realistically fly with. Renting them locally is not always an option either.

So the car was packed completely full, including a roof box, and we drove from Berlin to Amsterdam, took the ferry to Newcastle, crossed the UK by road, then another ferry to Ireland, and finally continued north. The journey took close to 38 hours. ▶

### *Did you know?*

HMS Viknor was a British armed merchant cruiser that sank with all 295 crew on 13 January, 1915, off Tory Island near Malin Head, Ireland. Originally the luxury liner Atrato (1888), it was requisitioned for World War One patrol duty.

Christian Wehrle has spent years capturing footage for his documentary Hidden Worlds, and here he gives an insight into some of the highs and lows involved in filming in harsh environments

Photographs by Ingo Leuschner, plus stills from Hidden Worlds



### Batteries

If there is one thing that caused more problems than expected, it was batteries. Most of my lights run on standard 18650 lithium cells - the same type used inside many camera batteries. The issue isn't the batteries themselves, but how airlines count them. A large camera battery is treated as a single unit, even though it contains multiple cells inside. Loose cells, however, are counted individually.

Ten cells in a battery pack count as one - the same ten cells in a plastic case count as ten. Even though the risk is essentially the same - if not lower in a protected case - you can suddenly exceed the allowed limit. Add camera, audio and dive equipment, and you quickly exceed what the regulations were designed for.

For almost three years, this worked. Then one day, it didn't. At the airport, my batteries were flagged. I had to send my AA batteries home before boarding and leave with fewer light batteries than planned. Normally, I use up to eight lights. This time, I had to work with four. Egypt adds another layer. Drones are strictly forbidden, and it's not a rule you want to test. With camera and audio equipment, it's easy to give the wrong impression - and that can lead to problems you really don't want.

### The camera problem

All dives in Hidden Worlds were done on a rebreather. For filming, it's an ideal tool. But there is something rarely discussed. There is a rule - the dive comes first, the camera second. In theory, that's correct. In practice, when you are filming, your entire focus shifts to the image. You look at the monitor, framing, light, movement. You want the shot. And for that moment, everything else disappears.

In film, there's a saying: 'It's not rocket science' or 'it's not brain surgery'. Because people behave as if what they're doing is the most-important thing in the world. Underwater, it's the same. You treat the image like it matters above everything else. And that's where it becomes dangerous. Because the moment something changes, you have to switch instantly.

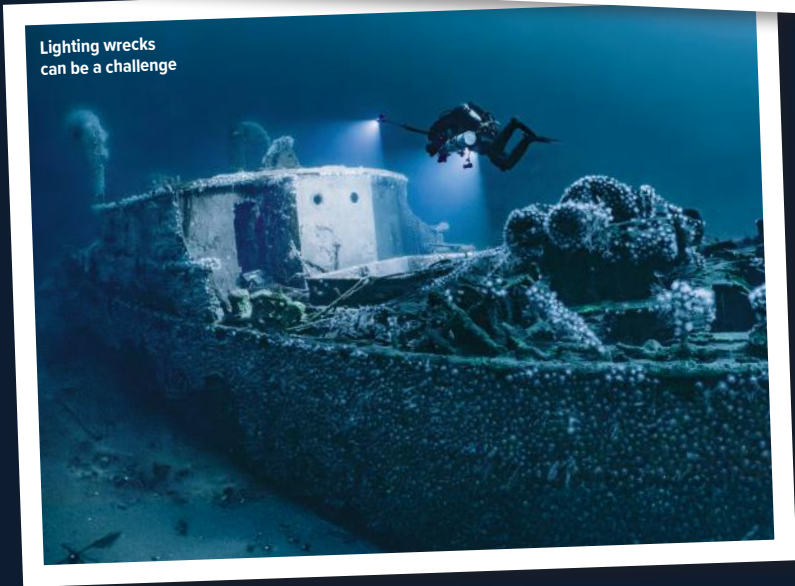
### 90m – Viknor

One of those moments happened at the wreck of the Viknor in Malin Head. Depths close to 90m, long decompression, cold water. During the dive, I realised my diluent cylinder was empty. I switched to open circuit, stabilised, and then fed the rebreather from a deep stage.

For a few minutes, I was producing far more bubbles than usual - which, on a rebreather, immediately signals that something isn't right. It didn't affect the filming itself,



Casement on a battleship off Malin Head



Lighting wrecks can be a challenge

“ Technical diving and film-making both require equipment. Put them together, and every trip starts to feel like moving a small expedition ”

but it did catch the attention of the divers above me. I had been the last one down, and by the time I reached my decompression stop around 40m-50m, they were already watching closely.

You could see the reaction straight away. When a rebreather diver suddenly starts bubbling like that, people assume a problem - and they're right to do so. They were ready in case something escalated, checking that I was stable and not rushing the ascent. The dive ended safely. But it's a reminder how quickly things can change.

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### When the ocean decides

Near the Suez Canal, we had a dive that changed within seconds. We were already committed to about 60 minutes of decompression when the current picked up. We were holding onto the mooring line, almost horizontal in the water, just trying to stay in position. The force was immediate - it was pulling hard, and simply holding on took real effort.

Then it flipped. Completely. Seconds later, the current pushed in the opposite direction. I remember thinking very clearly: there's no way we're holding onto this for another 60 minutes. That kind of strain, at that depth, for that long - it just wasn't realistic. And then it happened. The line snapped.

In a strange way, that was the solution. The decision was taken away from us. Instead of fighting to stay in place, we were suddenly drifting, with full decompression still ahead and container ships somewhere above.

We deployed our SMBs and continued the ascent under control while drifting. The boat tracked us. We got out safely - but not easily. Boarding the liveaboard wasn't possible in those conditions, and we were eventually picked up by a zodiac. You can plan everything. But the ocean decides.

### Caves, mines — and zero visibility

Some of the most-challenging moments didn't happen in the ocean. In Molnár János cave in Budapest, I planned a dive to around 90m, thinking deeper would mean better visibility and new ground. The reality was the opposite.

At around 60m-70m, the visibility started to deteriorate significantly. Instead of improving, it became worse with depth, influenced by flow and suspended particles. It quickly became clear that going deeper would not give us anything - no better images, no new perspective. So we changed the plan. ▶

CCRs give longer  
dive times



Tanks lying on the seabed  
off Malin Head



Eerie sight on a  
dive underground



Illuminating a  
ship's wheel





Stern of a wreck festooned in marine growth

“ Keeping contact with the line, managing the camera, staying calm - all at around 60m-70m, with decompression already building ”



Diver near the remains of a propeller

We turned earlier than intended and adjusted the dive to what actually made sense, not what we had hoped for. On the way back, I was allowed to lead so I could film properly - which is not always standard in that system. At some point, I took a wrong turn and ended up back in the area we had just left. For several minutes, I had to follow the line out with zero visibility, with a large camera system in one hand. Keeping contact with the line, managing the camera, staying calm - all at around 60m-70m, with decompression already building. That's not something you train for with a camera. There is no 'cave filming course'.

You figure it out in the moment - managing the camera, keeping contact with the line, and staying in control while moving through zero visibility.

Eventually, we made it out, but it's a very different kind of challenge - handling a large camera system while cave diving in those conditions.

**When it comes together**

There are also moments when everything works. Malin Head, 2025, was one of them. Good weather, stable conditions, dive after dive going as planned. And what you realise in those moments is this - those 'perfect' days only work because of everything that went wrong before.

**The hidden world beneath us**

There are dive sites, and then there are places most divers will never reach. Not because they are impossible, but because they require time, training, logistics and commitment. Long journeys offshore, deep wrecks, caves, mines - environments where the number of people who can go there becomes smaller and smaller.

Hidden Worlds is my love letter to diving - especially technical diving - but it's not about the equipment, it's about these places. These hidden underwater worlds, and the feeling they leave behind. Most people will never dive them. My hope is that, through this film, they still can. ■

*NB: Hidden Worlds is now available on Amazon Prime Video, with a wider release - including Google Play and Apple TV - coming soon.*



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# GEAR TEST EXTRA

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ORCATORCH ORCA 7 | SRP: £109



**Mark Evans:** OrcaTorch has been dropping quality dive lights the past couple of years, and their latest, the Orca 7, continues that trend. It is described by OrcaTorch as being a 'primary compact torch or back-up light', and having taken it into the depths of a British quarry in January, I can tell you it definitely ticks both those boxes.

When I first opened the padded, zippered case – a staple of OrcaTorch products, and a neat feature to keep your light safe during storage and travel – I admired the usual top-quality finish of the anodised aluminium torch, which looked resplendent in so-called Orca Orange (it is also available in Graphite Grey, Champagne Gold, Lava Red, and Space Silver).





“ Well, was I wrong! The Orca 7, which has a tight, 6-degree ultra-focused beam, can pump out 3,000 lumens on full power, and I was amazed how well it shone in the depths of Capernwray on a dull January day ”

My first thoughts were that it would make a fine back-up torch for cold-water diving, as its compact size means you can easily tuck it into a drysuit pocket, and it is there if the proverbial hits the fan with your main dive light. As with many of these smaller torches, they are perfectly adequate as a primary light in the tropics, when you do not need to cart some big unit with you, and you are not having to penetrate through floating detritus and gloom like you do in the UK and other similar places, but usually cannot cut the mustard as a main torch in those same conditions. ▶





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ORCATORCH ORCA 7 | SRP: £109

“ Despite its compact size, it is easy to operate even with drygloves on, and it sits nicely in a gloved hand ”



Well, was I wrong! The Orca 7, which has a tight, 6-degree ultra-focused beam, can pump out 3,000 lumens on full power, and I was amazed how well it shone in the depths of Capernwray on a dull January day.

Within some of the shipping containers, the bright beam sliced through the dark with ease, but even when swimming in open water and shining the torch towards the walls of the quarry some ten metres away, the beam's 'hotspot' was clear to see. Incredible performance for something so small.

Even on the lower power setting it was still very bright. Don't get me wrong, it is never going to light up an area like a larger primary torch, such as OrcaTorch's ZD710 MK2, which has a wider beam, but for its size, it defies expectations. The Orca 7 also has an SOS function for emergencies.

Despite its compact size, it is easy to operate even with drygloves on, and it sits nicely in a gloved hand. But this comes into its own as a dinky travel companion – it is lightweight, small enough to pop into a BCD or tech short pocket, and would be ideal for looking into nooks and crannies for critters on your next foreign jaunt.

It is supplied as standard in the case with a lanyard, charging cable, spare O-rings and two 21700 USB-C batteries, so you can have both charged up when you go diving and do a quick change-over as-and-when needed before you have to get the charging cable out. As we've said before, we find it handy to be able to just plug the cable directly into these batteries, there is no need to drag a charging station with you.

[www.orcatorch.com](http://www.orcatorch.com)



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## O'THREE PBB EXTREME BASE LAYER SYSTEM | SRP: £245

**Luke Evans:** As well as being renowned for their drysuits, British manufacturer O'Three are also well regarded for the warm and quality of their base layer systems, and I got to try out what they class as 'Stage Two' in their line-up, the PBB eXtreme Base Layer System. This is the thicker, warmer sibling of the PBB Plus Base Layer System, and is made from a double layer of Polarpro technical thermal fleece, which repels water, wicks away moisture and 'breathes' to avoid you sweating up a storm, and has improved wind resistance, which I totally appreciated on a chilly, windswept day in a car park in Capernwray quarry in Lancashire in January!

It comprises three elements – a set of salopettes, a long-sleeve top, and a pair of socks. This multi-part design means you can opt to forgo the top if you are diving in warmer waters, and so on. Given the water temperature was low single-digits, I was happy to wear the whole set-up, and thankfully it proved to be very effective at keeping me warm. The stretchy nature of the Polarpro fabric meant that I was not restricted in my movements either just in the undersuit, or once I was in my O'Three 90Ninety trilaminate drysuit.

The top has a comfort quarter-zip, and a soft-touch collar. It has useful hand-warmer pockets which I certainly made use of, as well as a neat hidden key pocket. The salopettes have a long double-ended zipper – which I appreciated when it came to a quick toilet run between dives! Not that I am going to need it, but I saw that there is routing for a P-Valve – something for the techies to take note of. The socks are very comfortable, and I found my feet did not feel chilly at all on my longest dives. The PBB eXtreme Base Layer System comes in a spacious roll-top dry bag, and is available in both male- and female-specific designs.

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**O'THREE 90NINETY | SRP: £2,095**



**Mark Evans:** The team at British drysuit manufacturer O'Three have gained a wealth of knowledge since being founded way back in 1989, and they have become renowned globally for their extensive range of neoprene drysuits, many of which have been seen on expeditions all over the world.

However, while their roots are firmly in neoprene, they realized that there was a serious shift in the market towards membrane suits, and so they have branched out into the world of trilaminate. As O'Three puts it, 'the 90Ninety came about from the realization that many diving holidays are effectively mini expeditions to all corners of the globe. Thus, the team at O'Three set out to develop a suit that would be the ideal travel companion wherever your diving adventures took you, from 90,0000 N to 90.0000 S (hence the name)'.

The 90Ninety is made with the same care and attention to detail as their suite of neoprene suits, and is a great-looking drysuit in their trademark subtle, understated style. The blue stitching, and the vibrant-blue suspender straps, stand out nicely in contrast to the grey trilaminate, and the embossed name in blue adds another eye-catching element.

True to its calling as the suit of choice for global travellers, the 90Ninety tips the scales at just over 4kg with the 4mm neoprene Pivot Boots fitted (as with our test suit), or 3.7kg with soft boots. However, this light weight does not mean O'Three have skimped at any stage. The 90Ninety is made from high-stretch, rip-stop trilaminate, which is cut on the bias to maximise stretch and comfort.

It has the classic trilaminate front-entry, full-telescopic torso design, and is equipped with a BDM metal zip. The suit should be hard-wearing too, as the knees are protected with





a double-layer of material reinforced with PU, and with impact-absorbing 3D mesh inserts, while there are PU-laminated sections on the shoulders, elbows and seat.

It features SiTech 'Quick' fast-replace neck ring and the tried-and-tested KUBI DryGlove System, which are both silicone, latex and neoprene compatible, so you will never miss another dive due to a broken seal as you can swap one out 'in the field' in just minutes.

The suit is equipped with Apeks low-profile auto dump and swivel inlet, and a Cargo 25 pocket on the right thigh that has a built-in slate pocket, D-rings and bungees for securing any contents. The perfect size for a spool and DSMB, and a back-up torch.

The 90Ninety comes with a Miflex carbon low-pressure hose, a 5mm Classic Semi-Hood, and the Classic Drysuit Kit Bag. The latter is a spacious holdall-style bag that can swallow a drysuit and undersuit in the main compartment with ease, and then has zippered pockets on either side, one of them containing a handy changing mat. The other side is great for stashing the supplied Jollop wrist-seal lubricant, and Zip-Slip zip protection.

When it came to testing the 90Ninety, I had the perfect test subject – my son Luke. Luke has racked up well over 150 cold-water dives since he started diving, but had always used a neoprene suit. So I wanted him to experience diving in a trilaminate suit, and see how different it was. So I will hand over to him for his first-hand views... ▶





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## O'THREE 90NINETY | SRP: £2,095

**Luke Evans:** My first drysuit was a neoprene version, and so it felt very similar to my various thickness wetsuits, being quite close-fitting and rear-entry (albeit a horizontal shoulder zipper and not a vertical spine zipper). However, after several years, I had grown quite a bit, and so the final dives in that were a bit of an effort to squeeze my 18-year-old body into a suit I'd had since I was 14!

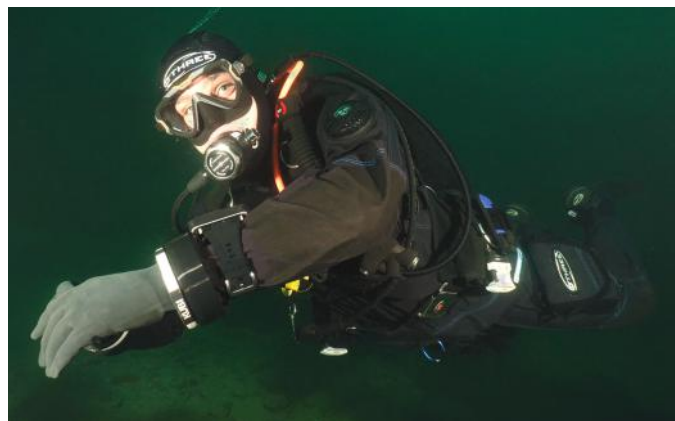
It was time for a new suit, and true to form, my Dad didn't miss the opportunity to use me as a guinea pig! I had never dived a trilaminate suit before, but had always been jealous watching how effortlessly he got into his while I was somewhat wrestling my way into my neoprene suit. So when the 90Ninety trilaminate from O'Three needed reviewing, he decided I would be the perfect candidate to try it out as a 'membrane newbie'.

Now we live up in North Shropshire, and O'Three are based on the south coast in Portland, so we had to sort out the logistics of getting the right size of suit. I needn't have worried – a few basic measurements later, and a 90Ninety was despatched to me in the post. I dually tried it on as requested and had photos taken from the front, back and sides. It was almost the perfect fit, but the legs were a little tight. That suit was sent back down to O'Three, and they then sourced a suit that took these changes into account and boom, next minute I had a drysuit that fit like a true made-to-measure. Getting into a trilaminate suit is so different from getting into my neoprene suit. I seemed to have my legs in and be pulling the suspenders over my shoulder before I even realized. It took a little getting used to putting my arms in and then my head, and I am still learning how to reach and smoothly close my zipper, but overall, getting into – and out of – the suit is just effortless.

Once in the suit, the next thing I noticed was the ease of movement. There was no feeling of restriction like you get with neoprene, bending and twisting just seemed so natural. Moving around setting up my kit and getting everything together before a dive was an easy matter.

Obviously, being a new suit that has only been dived half a dozen times so far, I have not needed to make use of the nifty SiTech 'Quick' fast-replace neck ring, but I was intrigued that you can swap out split seals yourself. In use, you don't notice the 'ring', and the silicone seal that it is currently fitted with is very comfortable on my neck.

I was also pleased to get my first experience of drygloves! I have always hated having cold hands, and so the thought of my fingers being encased in warm air instead of cold water seriously appealed! Again, it will take some time to get used to using drygloves, but the fitted KUBI DryGlove System is very straightforward. It is just a case of remembering to raise my arms from time to time to get ▶



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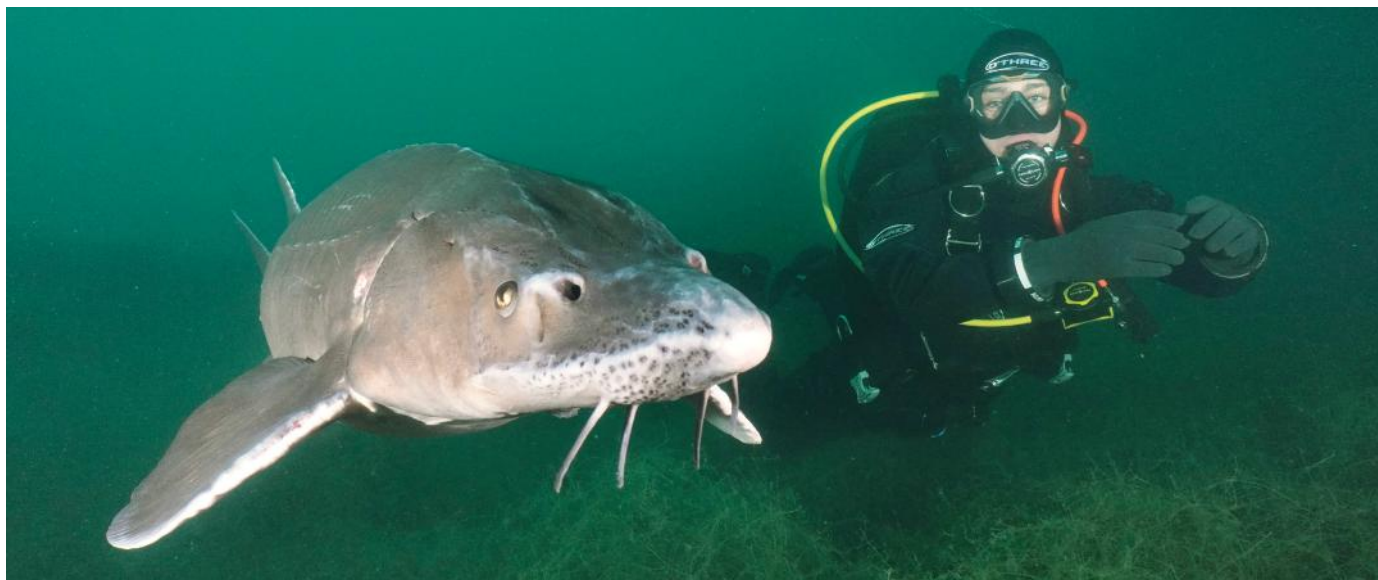
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O'THREE 90NINETY | SRP: £2,095



some nice, warm air into the gloves! I liked the dexterity that the drygloves offered thanks to how thin the outer glove is. Even with .5mm glove liners on underneath, I had no trouble completing manual tasks.

The Pivot Boots fitted to the suit were comfortable, and with the instep strap done up, I found that only the gas I wanted to get into my feet and legs migrated there. In fact, how simple it was to move the gas around inside my suit to get in a relaxed horizontal 'trim' position was immediately evident, and I felt very 'at home' in the suit in next to no time.

The supplied Classic Semi-Hood is a revelation – it is so warm. Even in 4 degrees C, my head did not feel cold even after nearly an hour in the water. The 5mm of the hood is super-soft and fit like a glove, and any air from my exhalations that made its way past the face seal didn't cause my hood to inflate on my head, as I have had in the past – the Airprene vent on the top of the hood efficiently got rid of any trapped gas in a fine stream of bubbles.

I was taken by the kitbag that came with the suit. It is huge, and had plenty of room for everything I needed. I really appreciated the changing mat when it came to getting back into my clothes in a wet environment!

So what are my over-riding findings? I am a big fan of trilaminate suits now! It is so easy to get in and out of, and I liked the fact that when I moved around on land, and underwater on the dive, I did not feel restricted in any way, shape or form. The 90Ninety seems very robust and durable, yet remains quite lightweight, and it dries very quickly – something my old neoprene suit did not do! I am also taken with the design of the suit – it doesn't scream 'look at me', but is very smart and understated. The blue highlights even match my camouflage blue wing!

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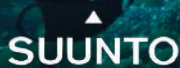
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## NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE

**EXPLORING SULAWESI ON THE PINDITO, PART ONE**  
 Don Silcock starts his adventure in Indonesia's North Sulawesi, safe in the hands of the legendary Edi Frommenwiler.

**Q&A: PAUL CARR**  
 We chat to the scuba diver, underwater photographer and talented artist about how his vibrant screen prints of corals are taking this humble marine life to the next level of artistic vision.

**COCOS ISLAND - THE 'REAL' JURASSIC PARK**  
 Richard Aspinall makes the long trek to this magical treasure island that inspired Robert Louis Stevenson and Jacques-Yves Cousteau, and was the fictional setting for Jurassic Park.

**TEMPTED BY TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS**  
 A peek behind the scenes of the itineraries offered by Explorer Ventures to the tropical Turks and Caicos Islands.

**THE PHILIPPINES - THROUGH THE VERDE ISLAND PASSAGE**  
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# MONTY'S MUSINGS

GO Diving Show and TV favourite Monty Halls waxes lyrical about scuba diving, travelling, the environment, conservation and innumerable other topics in his own inimitable style.

Photographs by Monty Halls



## GO DIVING SHOW LAUNCHES 2026 IN FINE STYLE

Let's face it, the Winter of 2025/26 was relentlessly honking. Not only did it teem with rain, turning streams into raging torrents, and everyone's lawn into a quagmire, but upon that lawn we had the four horsemen of the apocalypse galloping about having a high old time.

Bad news, worse weather, short days, barrelling storms, nil viz, heaving seas, and general seasonal malaise. I'm generally fairly upbeat in winter by the way, being a big fan of the crackling fire, the rainy run, and the piping hot chocolate. But by February even I was peering at the horizon, scanning desperately for a break in the clouds.

And then one came along, precisely at the same time as the GO Diving Show. This happy marriage of blue skies and shiny kit meant that, finally, we could declare 2026 open. So, the show. I had a rather strange personal perspective on this one by the way, being there very much as a 'bimbling between the aisles with no particular agenda' punter.

For years I've been saying to Mark (the tireless organiser, more of him later) that we need to get new speakers in, instead of the same old faces. So when I phoned him to ask to speak at this one, he - quite reasonably - said "We're already full chap, got some belters". What I said by way of a reply was "Oh, well done, jolly good" when what I unequivocally meant was "When I said get new speakers in, I didn't mean INSTEAD of me, I meant AS WELL as me...".

So, I'm going to start with those very speakers. I managed to see two - Chris Lemons the commercial diver (holy crap, what a story, and what an impressive human being), and Liz Parkinson, the Avatar stunt lady (fascinating and fun, and the dream job). Steve B was, as ever, completely rammed to the gunwales, and I was off perusing for Andy T's and Lizzie Daly's, but suffice to say they all rocked the joint. Like, properly rocked the joint.

All the while, there was hub-bub and clamour, mixing and matching, hissing and clanking, old friendships rekindled and new ones founded. The predominant emotion seemed to be one of relief actually - relief to be among a like-minded tribe, and relief that amid all the nonsense and darkness in the world, a familiar comfort could be found in buying a piece of kit, coveting another, booking a dream trip, or imagining a future as a world-class underwater



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photographer. For a while, just one precious weekend, reality was left at the double doors.

There's a few points to close this month's column. The first is a quick tribute to Mark and his team. The Dive Show concept was, just a few short years ago, a bit of a dead man walking (we can all recall half-empty halls and wide non-carpeted aisles). Through belief, persistence, persuasion, and not-inconsiderable personal financial risk, Mark has given the shows a new lease of life. So, when you see him at the next one, stop and give him a cuddle. He's easy to spot, as come the Saturday he's only had three hours sleep in the last week, will have a mobile phone in one hand and a walkie talkie in the other, will be walking somewhere fast, and has bags under his eyes that you could fit an open-circuit technical divers kit in. (NB from the editor - that description is pretty spot on...)

The second point is that, when you're cuddling him, lean in and whisper "...he meant as well as him, not instead of him." If that happens frequently enough, he'll eventually crack, I'm sure.

So, the show has officially launched us in the 2026 UK diving season. And here's that final point. Go well everyone, and (same bit of advice I give every year) take it easy on those first dives, eh? You are undoubtedly a god-like aquanaut, but sometimes it takes a few dives to unleash that awesomeness. Let the fun begin. ■

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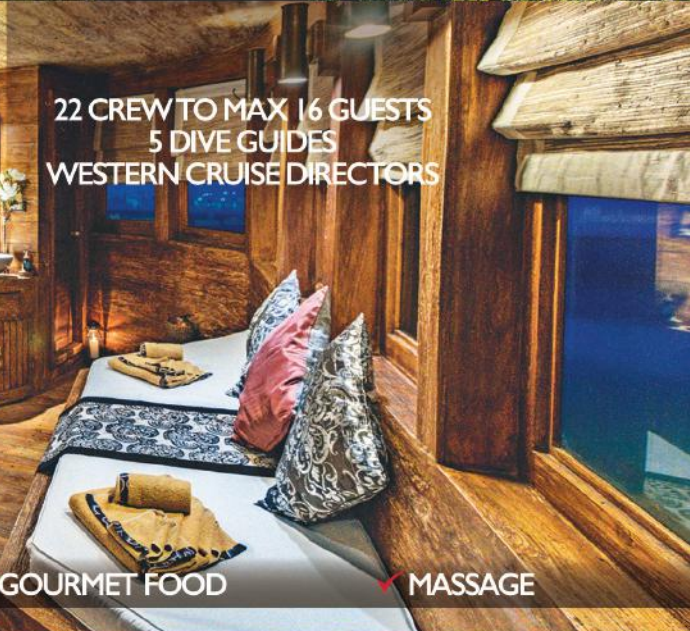
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