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## Close to Home or Abroad

Whether it is the salt air of a distant coast or the familiar waters of a local shore, the pull of the underwater world remains undeniable. There is a particular magic in being bitten by the 'wanderlust bug' - that urge to step beyond our comfort zones and into the unknown. While international travel often demands more of our time and spirit, the rewards are almost always unforgettable.

Yet, adventure isn't measured solely by the stamps in a passport. Opting to stay close to home offers a grounding sense of stability, especially as the cost of living remains a significant consideration for many. Choosing to stay local should never be viewed as a compromise; for those open to new challenges, there is a wealth of excitement to be found in our own backyard.

In this issue of Scuba Diver's North America edition, contributing editors Mike Salvarezza and Christopher Weaver return for the second act of their journey across the Continental US. Following their previous exploration of the Florida Keys, Hawaii, and the California coast, they now pivot to the rusted beauty of American wreck diving. Their coverage spans the spectrum of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, highlighting both the 'genuine' historical tragedies of the deep and the 'artificial' reefs that have given new life to retired steel.

For those currently nursing a case of wanderlust, we journey to several global heavy hitters. Richard Aspinall takes us to Elba Reef in Egypt's Deep South, nestled near the Sudanese border with Aggressor Adventures. While the region's current political climate is complex, it is never too soon to dream of your next great expedition. Our international coverage continues with a vibrant excursion into Indonesia's Banda Sea alongside Emperor Divers, followed by an exploration of the Visayas in the Philippines aboard the *Infiniti*, the newest vessel from Atlantis Resorts.

The depth of this issue extends into our conversations and cinema as well. Our Q&A series continues this month with Steve Kaplan, the founder of Trident Adventures in Hawaii. Finally, Christian Wehrle takes us behind the lens of his documentary, *Hidden Worlds*. He shares the grit and grace required during his three-year journey to film the world's most-challenging environments - from deep-water wrecks to forgotten mines and hidden caves.

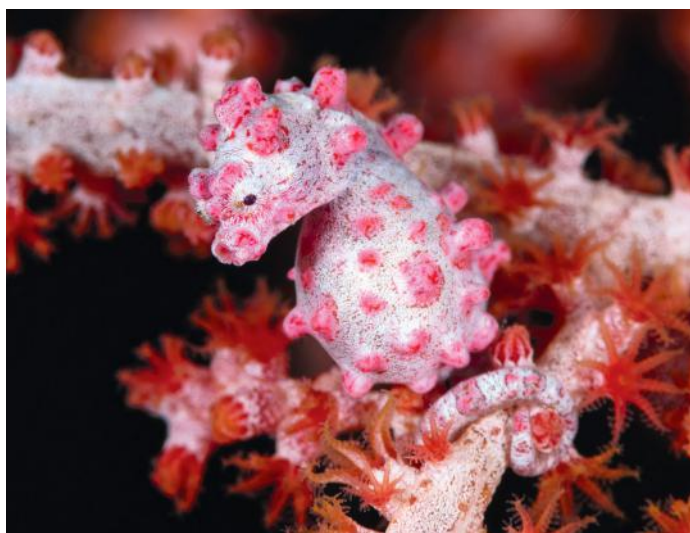
Whether your next descent is just a short drive away or waiting for you on a far horizon, let this issue remind you that every day is an opportunity to see, explore, and evolve. The next great discovery is yours to make.

Walt Stearns, Editor (North America)



*"This is the best diving I have ever done in 30 years of diving. All of the staff are the most helpful and gracious I have ever met in 50 years of traveling. The staff are as magnificent as the reef!"*

*~ Russell Graham, Dec 2025*



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### NEW ITINERARIES & DESTINATIONS:

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- Chiang Mai, Thailand

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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](https://www.divernet.com/news) [www.divernet.com/news](https://www.divernet.com/news)



## ONE SHOW.. TWO LOCATIONS..

The Scuba Show is expanding in 2026 – we will be celebrating the 39th anniversary of the California event as it returns to its spiritual home in Long Beach Convention Center (30-31 May), and welcoming the inaugural east coast event at the Atlantic City Convention Center (6-7 June)

**W**hether you're an experienced diver, a new enthusiast, or just curious about the underwater world, the Scuba Show brings together everything you love about diving under one roof.

Scuba Radio's Greg Holt will be entertaining the crowds on a morning before and as the shows open, so expect plenty of fun and games and the chance to win amazing prizes.

The Scuba Show offers two full days of ocean adventure, hand's-on experiences, and exclusive show specials, and is where the US dive community comes together to celebrate the underwater world – and now it is on both the west and the east coasts.

### Long Beach Scuba Show

The Long Beach Scuba Show, this year sponsored by Divers Alert Network, is celebrating its 39th anniversary in 2026 (30-31 May), and it represents the first show under the banner of new owners Rork Media Limited, which also runs the GO Diving Shows in the UK and Australia, and publishes the global-multi-edition Scuba Diver magazine, as well as being behind the Scuba Diver Magazine YouTube Channel, and long-established website Divernet.

Fans of the long-running event will be delighted to hear that Rork Media plan to retain everything that made the Scuba Show such a staple on the West Coast diving circuit, and enhance it with new and improved elements, including a Main Stage with a huge video wall right in the exhibition hall itself, a new layout designed to stimulate exploration around the hundreds of booths, and additional interactive attractions including a VR dive on a deep-water shipwreck in the Baltic Sea. Main Stage speakers include Hollywood stunt performer Liz Parkinson (who is also acting as MC), cave diver and explorer Patrick Widmann, freediving guru Kirk Krack, UW photographer Annie Crawley, and commercial diver Chris Lemons, whose amazing tale of survival in the depths of the North Sea was made into the big-budget movie Last Breath in 2025.

The three seminar rooms have been organised into themes, to make it easier to find speakers/topics of interest,



## SCUBA SHOW

so prepare to dive into Adventure, Inspiration, and UW Imaging. Explore hundreds of exhibitors showcasing the latest scuba gear, dive destinations, underwater photography equipment, training programs, and ocean conservation initiatives. Attend inspiring seminars led by world-renowned dive experts, explorers, and photographers, and connect with dive professionals, travel operators, and fellow divers from across the country.

There is also the opportunity to expand your skillset. The PSI-PCI Visual Cylinder Inspection course is open to everyone who wishes to inspect high-pressure breathing gas cylinders, or just know about the process. These specialty courses support the inspection process with formal function specific training on valve maintenance and repair, and Oxygen Cylinder Cleaning. Go to [www.pscyliners.com](http://www.pscyliners.com) for more information and to book a slot.

### Atlantic City Scuba Show

In 2026, the Scuba Show expands to cover the east coast, with its inaugural show - sponsored by scuba.com - taking place in Atlantic City on 6-7 June. Many of the elements from the well-established Long Beach event will be making the transition across the country, along with all of the fresh new additions, including the Main Stage, the Inspiration Stage, and the VR dive on a deep-water shipwreck.

Main Stage speakers include Liz Parkinson, Patrick Widmann, wreck detective John Chatterton, UW photographer Becky Kagan Schott, and DEEP aquanaut Dawn Kernagis.

# INDUSTRY NEWS



Like at Long Beach, there will be hundreds of exhibitors showcasing the latest scuba gear, dive destinations, underwater photography equipment, training programs, and ocean conservation initiatives, and PSI-PCI will be running their specialty courses as well.

## Get your tickets now!

Tickets are on sale now for the Scuba Show, and new for 2026, there is a change to the cost of entry – there is now one ticket price, which gets every attendee full access to the Exhibition Hall, and entry to all seminars.

With many of the speakers on the dedicated stages/ seminar rooms either only presenting on one of the days, or giving two different talks, plus with the headline acts on the Main Stage, and the plethora of booths, interactive elements and much more, there is plenty to keep you occupied on both days, so why not make a weekend of it?

Tickets are available now at [www.scubashow.com](http://www.scubashow.com) priced at \$33 for a day ticket, and \$60 for a weekend pass. There is also the option of a VIP Pass, which includes a weekend pass plus 6 issues of Scuba Diver magazine and 6 issues of California Diving News (Magazine delivery US & Canada residents only), and a Scuba Show Dive Team T-shirt, for \$100.

Under 16s go free – bring the family and let the kids dive into the fun as well.

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

Aggressor 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 traveler, 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 honorably 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.

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.

Despite his many professional accomplishments and global travels, Wayne's greatest pride and joy was his family. When he was not traveling 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 travelers worldwide.

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 60ft. It will be the first subsea habitat deployed in the US in 40 years.

Installation was 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."

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 program 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.



### 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.

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**T**he main Elba reef sits across the Egyptian and Sudanese border and gives its name to a widespread group of remote reefs, which remain largely unexplored - it really is an itinerary for divers who want to get away from the hustle and bustle of the north. Even the reefs of St Johns, Zabargad and Rocky are well north of Elba. It takes a bit of time to get to Elba though, so best to start at the beginning.

The Aggressor V went in the water in summer 2025 and is based at the small and dusty marina at Hamata, a spot well-known to kitesurfers and surrounded by the scrubby mangroves of the Wadi-el-Gemal National Park, around two to three hours' drive south from Marsa Alam. The latest addition to the Aggressor fleet is a fine-looking vessel, sleek with a silver hull. At 131 foot long and with five decks, she provides plenty of room for 26 guests. Perhaps more importantly, she's capable of dealing with the sometimes-choppy seas the 'Deep South' experiences.

Arriving on a liveaboard can be a little daunting, at first, but for seasoned divers everything was as you'd expect and even novices quickly got the hang of things - a welcome to the yacht, a briefing and tour of the safety features and then setting up kit. Followed by a general dive safety briefing and, once the paperwork and remaining admin was dealt with, an evening to unwind and start telling diving stories to other guests, before a three-course meal and hopefully a good night of sleep after the long day of travel.

In the morning, as the sun rose, we left the marina and headed southeast to Abu Galawa for a check dive. These are essential to ensure correct weighting and to demonstrate we knew one end of a DSMB from another. It's always reassuring to know all is working well and back aboard I learned how to use the yacht's professional espresso-maker before breakfast. In my experience, Aggressor yachts have always offered good coffee!

---

**There are few finer things than being on a liveaboard, other than perhaps being on a liveaboard without any other ship, boat or yacht in sight. Having a reef system to yourself in the Red Sea is not an everyday experience, but Richard Aspinall was lucky and about to enjoy the best part of a week touring the remote and rarely visited Elba region, on Aggressor Adventure's new Red Sea Aggressor V - and all in glorious solitude!**

Photographs by Richard Aspinall

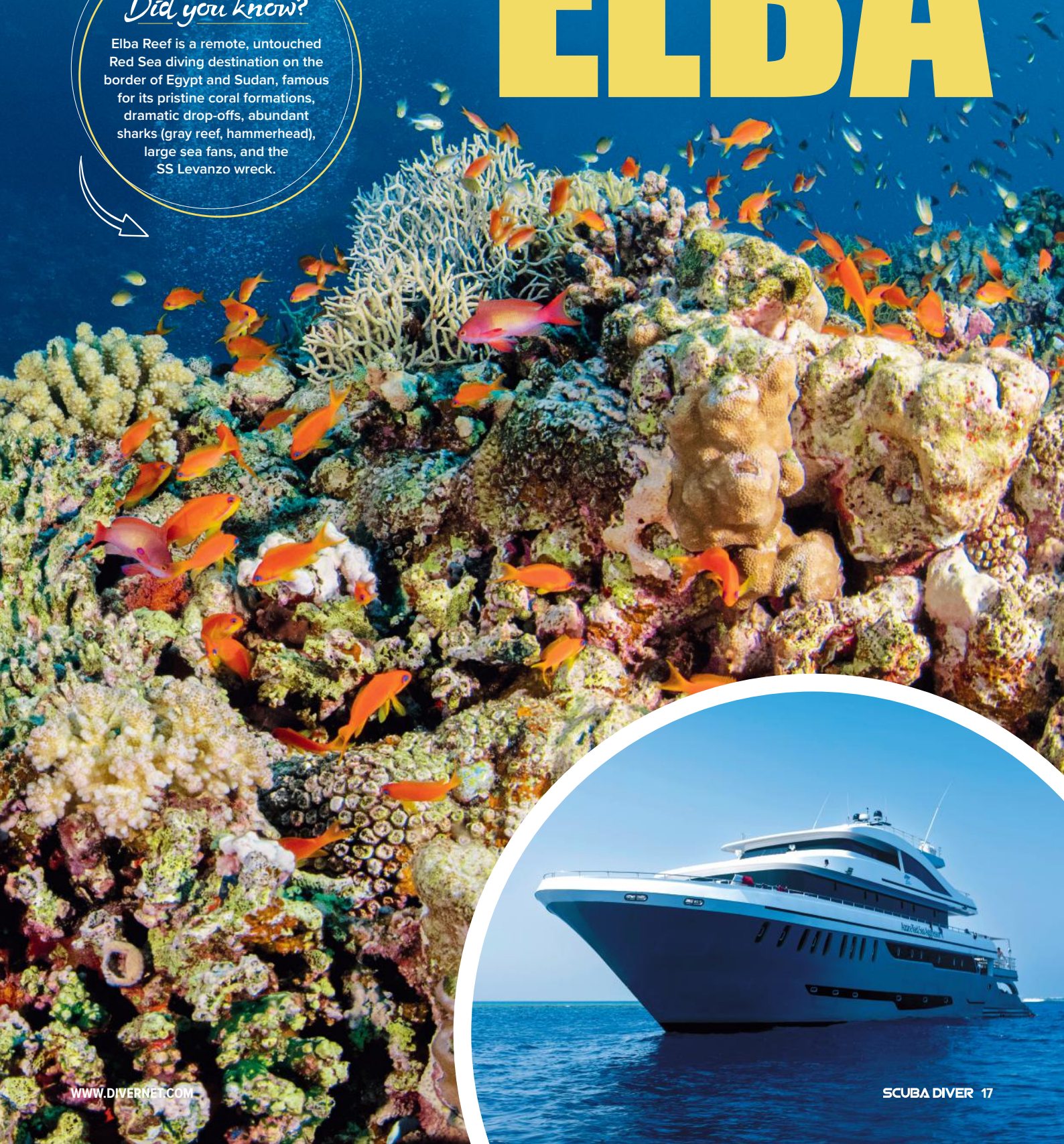
Our first 'proper' dive would be on the Trawler Wreck at Mikauwa. This small vessel was a little deep, with her prop at around 100ft, and the rest of her out of reach and down the slope towards 164ft. She's easy to find though, by following a trail of detritus along the sandy slope. The story goes that her crew knew they were about to hit the reef and threw everything on hand overboard, including ropes and nets, which proceeded to foul her prop. After exploring her superstructure, we shallowed up and returned to the yacht, ready for the afternoon and night sailing. In the morning we'd be in Elba! ▶



# Exploring ELBA

## *Did you know?*

Elba Reef is a remote, untouched Red Sea diving destination on the border of Egypt and Sudan, famous for its pristine coral formations, dramatic drop-offs, abundant sharks (gray reef, hammerhead), large sea fans, and the SS Levanzo wreck.

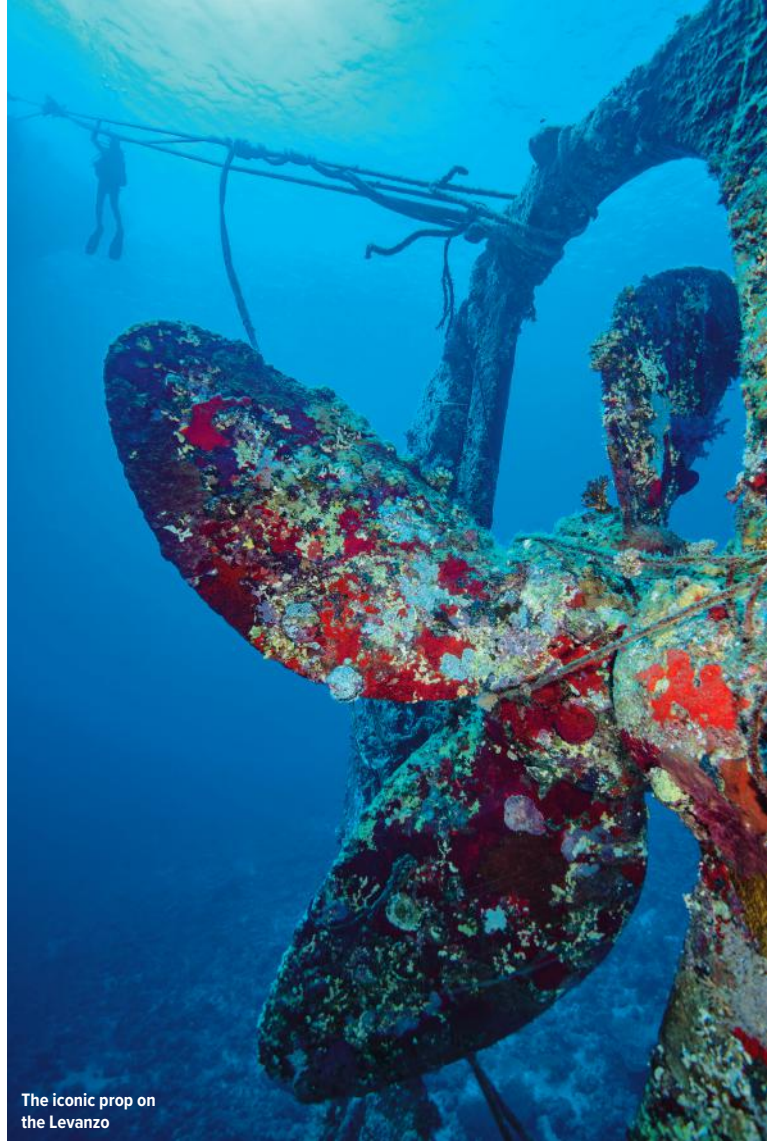


The yacht's steel hull cut through the mild swell as we made good progress for around 18 hours, passing through the Fury Shoal region and southwards once more. It was a windy day at Sha'ab Shaga as the sun rose and we saw the long reef from the surface. We were in Elba now and finally in Sudanese waters. Several seabirds wheeled overhead, and a few hitchhiking songbirds had spent the night with us it seemed, making their long migration a little easier.

Sha'ab Shaga appears split, with a plateau cutting through its long thin body and one at its southern tip that we accessed from zodiacs, to tour large pinnacles and nearby sandy shallows. As my first introduction to the corals of the area, I was interested to see how Elba was coping with the heat stress that has caused die-off of corals further north. I wouldn't say the corals were perfect, but there were large thriving table corals and expanses of fire coral - not a true coral, but still a species of reef-builder, that has seen significant declines on other reefs. I should add the zodiacs are larger than average and both have ladders! Long gone are the days of embarrassment as you're hauled over the sides and end up flailing around among weight pouches and floppy DSMBs.

The coral was even healthier on the up-turned hull of the 370-foot SS Isola di Levanzo, which was the highlight of the trip's wreck diving. Sunk in March 1923 after a failed salvage attempt after running aground on the reef, this Italian cargo and passenger vessel makes for a spectacular dive. Her massive prop and rudder now atop her hull as she slopes bow-wards, stands like an iconic sculpture, dominating the sea scape around it.

The Aggressor V normally supplies around 32 per cent nitrox, so we'd diluted down significantly to enable a deeper dive. The top of Levanzo's rudder is at around 65ft, but you can enter her hold at around 100ft and explore two silty levels with plenty of sharp metal – so be careful - before passing along her hull to the point where she snapped in half and her bow section sank below the depths of recreational diving. She would be, I imagine, a dream for technical divers. For me, I could only look downwards into the depths and then ascend before I hit a deco warning. Happily, the dive was almost current-free, something we'd enjoy all week in fact, but as I returned to the prop and ascended on the mooring line, I was grateful for the easy conditions.



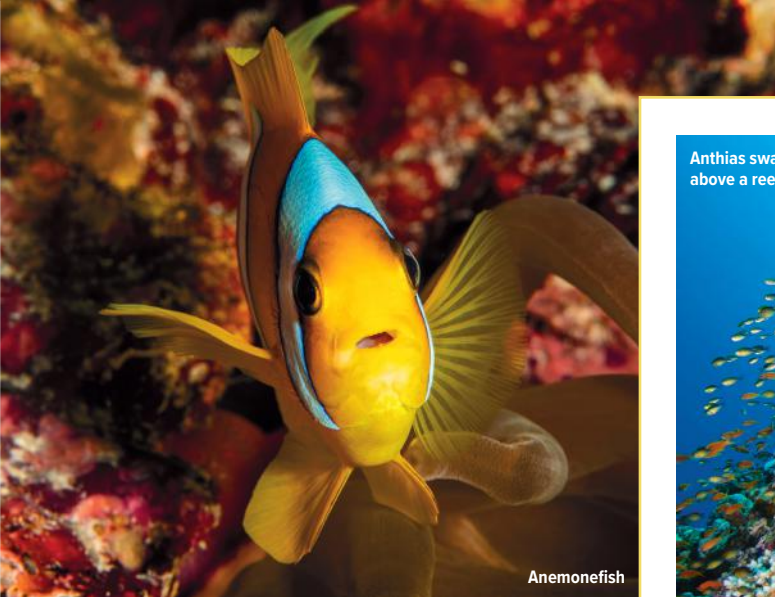
The iconic prop on the Levanzo



Pristine soft corals on Elba Reef



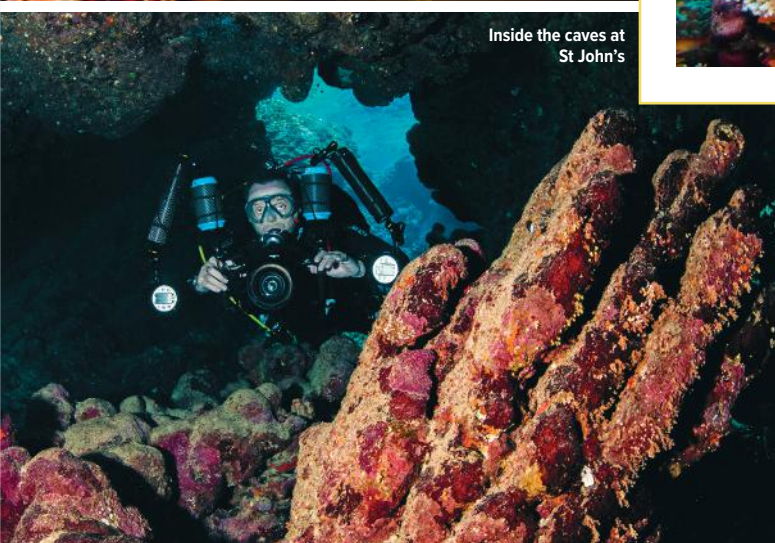
Spinner dolphins at Sataya Reef



Anemonefish



Anthias swarm above a reef



Inside the caves at St John's

Pyjama nudibranch



The Grumman HU-16 Albatross

Our next two dives would be at Elba West, another rich and rewarding reef, full of life that also made for an excellent night dive. Having only one boat above you makes night dives a bit easier and removes the potential embarrassment of returning to the wrong vessel and needing the 'zodiac of shame'! I found a few subjects from sleeping pufferfish to pyjama slugs.

Our third day would offer four more reef dives. Big Gota Elba offered some superb pinnacles topped with rich corals and shoals of fusiliers and a brief encounter with a whitetip reef shark. Sha'ab Shalal (named for the nearby waterfall, found in the wet season) and its nearby shallow satellite reef offered superb diving, and again, ideal night diving with

cuttlefish, and whip coral gobies for the macro photography fans. I also saw my second turtle of the trip, a hawksbill, enjoying a messy meal of tree corals

We continued to explore the reefs around Shalal. The small reef of Habili Shalal was a wonderful site, with good numbers of coralivorous fish and several blue-spotted rays. Habili are small reefs that don't break the surface.

The reefs here were variable once more, with some indication of coral loss, but also hints that not all is lost. Large table corals and some large sprays of fire coral indicated a healthy reef. In deeper areas and where currents are stronger, the reef is cloaked in tree corals in all their wonderful colors - ghostly white to reds, to rich clarets and purples, and the visibility was truly excellent, making for some spectacular views. One coral type seemingly doing well is the Pocillopora group of often rich pink and violet-hued hard corals. I saw a lot of new colonies of this tough genus growing atop dead corals. Some form of recovery, albeit limited, is occurring, but will it last and what will the 'new' reefs look like? That being said, some of the reefs were as good as any I've ever seen in the Red Sea in over 20 years of diving. ▶

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“ The coral was even healthier on the up-turned hull of the 370-foot SS Isola di Levanzo, which was the highlight of the trip’s wreck diving ”

Our final wreck dive and third dive of the day was in the absolute worst conditions I’ve ever experienced in the Red Sea, which created challenges with imagery and the most-terrible case of backscatter for anyone with a camera. That being said, it was a great dive - you don’t often get to explore a recently discovered aircraft.

Found in 2024, the plane is a (US-made) Grumman HU-16 Albatross, often used in search and rescue operations, with some still flying today. While we know what the aircraft is, there still remains a mystery - what is it doing on the side of a reef? Three things might help us get a little closer to the answer. Firstly, as an amphibious plane - a flying boat – it was capable of being towed and there is indeed a tow line attached to the bow, below the cockpit. Secondly, both radial engines appear to have been removed without damage to their mountings. And lastly, I was told by an aircraft expert on the boat, that much of the radar system had also been removed, something hard to do in a post-crash salvage, I’d imagine.

It is tempting to assume the Albatross was under tow and either deliberately scuttled, or abandoned after an incident of some kind, be it due to poor seas or poor seamanship? Or simply dumped at random. However, I could be entirely wrong and the damage we see to the starboard wing, cockpit and missing underwing floats were the result of a rough water landing? Was the shackle and cable attached after the aircraft’s demise part of a salvage or relocation attempt? At present there’s no indication I can find online, or indeed on the aircraft itself, to say who was responsible for its operation or disposal. HU-16s were used by several countries, including the US and organisations such as the UN, but I could find no mention of them being used by the Egyptian or Sudanese government. Some were privately operated. Surely, someone must know the tale.

Today, the plane is a very easy wreck to explore at no more than 50ft, with a reef close by.



I found the cockpit fascinating – full of glassfish, cardinals and dusky sweepers – a wonderful little cave, but I did curse the conditions. I imagine they’d rarely be repeated though, and I was just very unlucky. You can look into the fuselage and again the local fauna has decided it’s a cave.

While the Albatross was a great dive, I did enjoy the following night dive, a little further north as we started to leave the Elba region and headed back northwards once more. Ohrob Reef offered four species of nudibranch on another enjoyable night dive. Night dives in the Red Sea are often limited to 45 minutes and the sites chosen are usually shallow at around 15m or thereabouts, but night dives cannot always be guaranteed due to current or the needs of the itinerary. Again, we sailed through the night, to awake in St Johns, for a reef dive at Big Gota of St Johns, to explore some swim-throughs and arches with large colonies of magnificent anemones (the species *H. magnifica*, not ▶

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The Red Sea  
Aggressor V



Hard corals and blades of fire coral



Brown-edged glossodorid



just really nice ones), and their clownfish residents. The best dive at St Johns would be at the famous St Johns Caves, where we'd enjoy a further night dive.

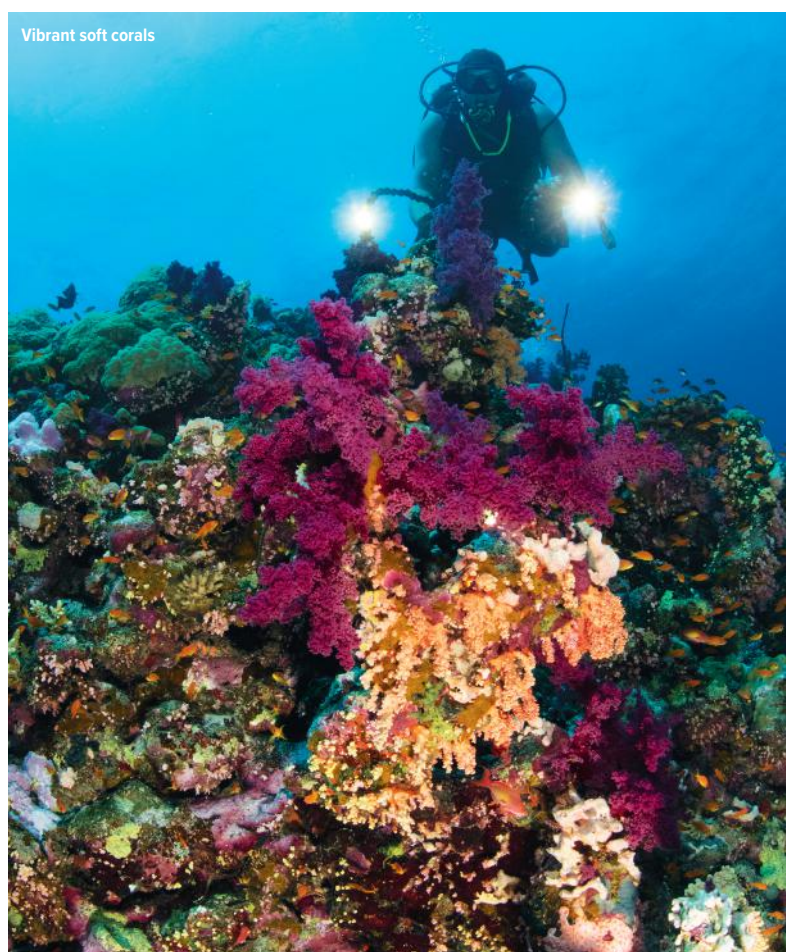
The trick with the caves here (and at the similar Sha'ab Claudia, we'd dive the morning of the following day), is to try to access the caves and swim-throughs without the inevitable mass of floating particulates, liberated by the fins of divers before you. Knowing what to expect, I was fortunate to dive with just my buddy and not encounter parties of divers being guided through the maze-like reef. Naturally this increases the risk of getting lost, and 'retracing your steps' might become necessary. We were lucky, the conditions were favorable, and the shallow dive was a delight. Blue-spotted rays sat in the openings in the caves and shoals of snapper, in the more-open central area, parted lazily to let us through.

For many, the highlight of the trip, was the stop at Sataya Reef to snorkel with the resident pod of spinner dolphins. Sataya is a well-visited spot now, with many boats taking their guests, sometimes via zodiac, to witness these captivating animals first-hand. The spinners, quick and agile as they are, are not easy to photograph. The shallows, full of

bubbles, the brief time you have with them as they pass by, and their simple speed made it a challenge, but always an enjoyable one.

The best of the reefs, and the final dive of the trip, was Sha'ab Maksur in the Fury Shoals area. Maksur means 'broken' and from the surface you can see why - it does appear split in two by a deep gash. It is similar to the famous Elphinstone, with plateaux at either end of its long body, but in this case with soaring pinnacles cloaked in soft coral that form the best part of the dive. Elba offers something increasingly hard to find - an almost pristine Red Sea, free of other boats, divers and some impressive wrecks. The Levanzo was wonderful! The yacht itself runs a close second as star of the show. It's large, it's capable and supremely comfortable. The guides are excellent and the food delicious. I've been on many Red Sea liveaboards and right now, I can confidently say this is the best. ■

Vibrant soft corals



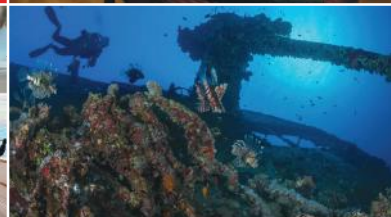
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**A**way from the busier circuits of Raja Ampat and Komodo National Park, the Banda Islands sit scattered across one of the deepest seas on the planet - but reaching them requires commitment.

That sense of distance is precisely what defines the Banda experience, though. From the moment the last sliver of populated coastline slips below the horizon, you understand this is not just another dive trip, but a journey into a blue-water wilderness.

A liveaboard trip in this part of the world is unlike any other, with hundreds of nautical miles covered in the aim of finding isolation and solitude, and overnight crossings meaning you possibly start one day many, miles from where you dived the last. The geography is what shapes the Banda Sea adventure and with depths of more than 23,000ft in places, this really is the 'deep blue'. Volcanic islands and atolls - such as the famous Nil Desperandum - can have shallow plateaus, as well as incredible steep drop-offs into nothingness.

And it is from this nothingness that divers may be granted one of the ocean's great spectacles - schooling scalloped hammerheads.

There are no promises here as the Banda Sea does not operate on a schedule. However, with luck and a good guide on your side, there is every chance of seeing the unmistakable silhouettes emerge from the blue and pass by with their silver flanks catching the light before disappearing back into the depths from which they came.

It is a different kind of shark encounter from the choreographed certainty of some global hotspots. Often yours will be the only boat nearby meaning no crowds - just you and your buddy enjoying a procession of oceanic hunters in one of the deepest seas on Earth. The isolation really heightens the moment.

It is not all about the hammerhead, though. This is the Coral Triangle, where diversity of marine life is greater than anywhere else in the world.

Banda Sea is a lot 'spongier' than most other areas, with huge varieties of many different species. Barrel sponges, for example, are bigger than a human and this is a place where it is possible to have the very rare experience of seeing them spawning. They 'erupt' like a volcano, pumping out clouds and when one starts, they all go off. The range of diving is wide with some interesting night dives also available - not least at Banda Neira. Here, once the sun has gone, divers can go looking for the elusive mandarinfish - a firm favorite of photographers. A magical experience as dusk settles, these brilliantly colored little fish emerge to perform their brief, balletic mating dance. With patience and a careful approach, it is possible to witness one of reef diving's most enchanting shows.

Above the water at Banda Neira, Gunung Api (Fire Mountain) dominates the skyline but below the surface line its historical influence is equally evident. Past eruptions have sent rivers of lava down its flanks and into the ocean, creating the hard volcanic foundations on which some of Indonesia's healthiest reefs now thrive. ▶

Diver looking over a large and healthy coral formation  
© Adrian Stacey

An underwater photograph of a coral reef. In the foreground, there are several large, flat, brownish-green coral plates. In the center, a large, yellowish, porous sponge structure is prominent. The background is a clear blue water column. The title 'The breathtaking BANDA SEA' is overlaid on the top half of the image.

# The breathtaking BANDA SEA

## *Did you know?*

The Banda Sea, located in eastern Indonesia within the Coral Triangle, is a deep, remote, and ecologically rich marine region. It boasts extreme depths, pristine coral reefs, and high biodiversity, including migratory hammerheads.

There are dive destinations that are easy to find and easy to love, and there are those that require a little more dedication before they reveal their rewards. The Banda Sea belongs firmly in the latter category

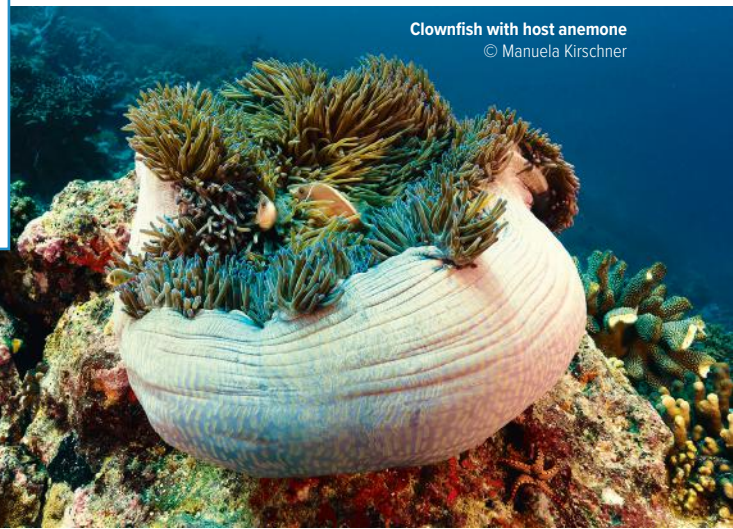
Photographs courtesy of Emperor Divers unless credited



Whip coral  
© Manuela Kirschner



Volcanic island in the Banda Sea



Clownfish with host anemone  
© Manuela Kirschner

The irony that such destructive nature has created a habitat for abundant life is tangible. Elsewhere around the Banda Islands, sites such as Pulau Hatta offer similarly dramatic wall diving. The reefs here cling to the island's edge before plunging almost vertically into open water. Giant sea fans lean into the current, their branches home to cryptic life for those willing to look closely.

Reef sharks cruise the periphery. Fusiliers stream past in endless ribbons of movement. The sensation is one of suspension – as though you are floating beside a submerged mountain range that continues far beyond the reach of light.

What elevates the Banda Sea further is the sense that it remains lightly touched. There are no lines of dive resorts along the shore, no crowded moorings with boats jostling for position. Liveaboards pass through seasonally, navigating long stretches of open water between islands. Crossings can be lengthy. Weather and currents dictate the rhythm of the days. Mobile signals fade to nothing. The horizon is often empty in every direction.

When civilisation is in sight, land visits here are unlike those almost anywhere else in Indonesia. Banda Neira was once the epicentre of the global nutmeg trade, the ▶



The cabins onboard Harmoni are luxurious

## Did you know?

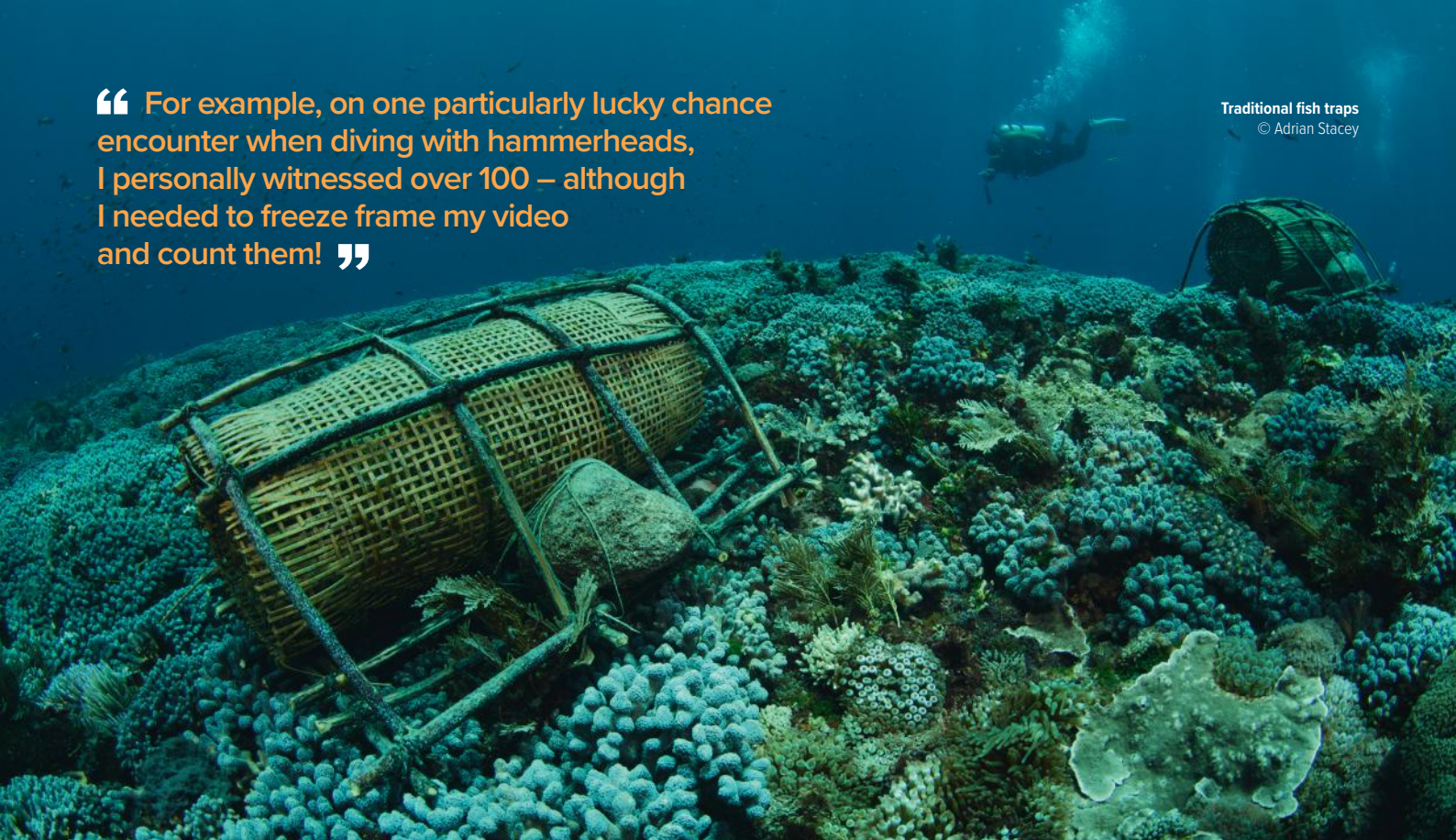
The Emperor Harmoni is a 157-foot liveaboard operating in Indonesia. The upper deck has four staterooms, and the lower deck has eight cabins, welcoming up to 24 guests.



Emperor Harmoni liveaboard

“ For example, on one particularly lucky chance encounter when diving with hammerheads, I personally witnessed over 100 – although I needed to freeze frame my video and count them! ”

Traditional fish traps  
© Adrian Stacey



Moray eel posing for a photo



Colorful nudibranch  
© Manuela Kirschner

### The Banda Sea – a first-hand account

Emperor Divers are one of the operators to take guests to this remote section of the world’s largest archipelagic country. Their videographer, Steffan Kilby, has dived these waters on many occasions and was recently back onboard Emperor Raja Laut to take in the Banda Sea’s vast wonder once again.

“It is the distance traveled that makes it such a special trip,” he says. “You can really feel in complete isolation and that you are taking part in an adventure – and expedition – and not just any diving holiday.

“Its seasonal nature also plays a part in that. Because there are only a few months of the year when crossing the Banda Sea is possible it makes it feel like a special treat to be there. Even for those of us who have dived it before several times, it still has that exclusive element to it. From a diving perspective, there are no guarantees. This is open ocean and the fact you’re out in raw nature gives drama to each dive. It’s

not a precise science where you can just turn up and be spoon fed a certain experience – you never know what you will see until you get underwater. For example, on one particularly lucky chance encounter when diving with hammerheads, I personally witnessed over 100 – although I needed to freeze frame my video and count them!”

He continued: “Above the water it is special, too. Because at times you are so far away from the nearest towns and villages there is zero light pollution. At night you get such an amazing display with the Milky Way so clear and shining down on you.

“The history of these islands also adds to the unique feel of a trip. Standing on a fort, looking at an active volcano over a natural harbour, you don’t just feel like you’ve traveled a great distance but also traveled back in time. You can so easily imagine you are back in the 1700s when you visit the Spice Islands. Exploring the Banda area is a proper journey – a dive trip like no other.”

Emperor Raja  
Laut at sea



## Emperor Divers

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Emperor Divers offers two itineraries that take guests to the majesty of the Banda Sea. Their Alor & Banda Sea trip goes between Maumere and Ambon, while the Raja Ampat & Banda Islands itinerary journeys between Ambon and Sorong. Due to needing suitable conditions, these are only available a few times a year around September and October. The company have two liveboards to choose from - Emperor Harmoni, and Emperor Raja Laut. Harmoni is a bespoke-made Phinisi-style vessel which launched in 2022 and offers extreme comfort to 24 guests. Raja Laut – meaning ‘King of the Sea’ – is a beautiful schooner with 12 berths, providing an intimate and exclusive travelling experience. They also offer liveboard trips and have dive centers across Egypt, Maldives and the Solomon Islands.

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



The local  
Banda nutmeg

Gorgonian fan coral  
© Manuela Kirschner



tiny islands of the Banda group producing a commodity once worth more than gold – hence their nickname, the ‘Spice Islands’.

Nutmeg trees grow in shaded groves, their fruit split open to reveal the vivid red mace wrapped around the seed. Colonial-era houses line narrow streets. Children play by the waterfront as fishing boats rock gently in the shallows. The scent of spice hangs faintly in the air. It is a powerful juxtaposition: beneath the waves, pristine reefs and roaming sharks; above them, centuries of history written in stone and seed.

European powers fought fiercely for control, building forts that still stand watch over the harbour. Fort Belgica rises above the town, its thick stone walls a reminder of a time when these remote islands shaped global economics.

Indeed, such was their importance and value that at the Treaty of Breda in 1667, the Netherlands exchanged the tiny island of Run – barely 1.8 miles long - for a patch of land which later became known as Manhattan! As the saying goes, they swapped a small nut for a big apple.

For those with energy to spare, a climb partway up Gunung Api offers sweeping views across the Banda Islands. From the slopes of the volcano, you can appreciate just how steeply the land falls away. The geological forces that

created this landscape are ever-present - the Pacific Ring of Fire in action. The underground activity can literally be experienced on some islands just by putting a hand to the sand and feeling the warmth created by goings-on below.

What makes the Banda Sea a must-do itinerary is not a single marquee species or one headline dive site. It is the combination of elements - deep-ocean topography, exceptional hard coral health, high fish biomass, seasonal hammerhead potential and genuine remoteness. It is the knowledge that beneath you lies an abyss thousands of feet deep, and around you an ecosystem that thrives precisely because it is difficult to reach.

This is not the easiest diving Indonesia has to offer, nor the most predictable. Conditions can be dynamic. Currents can run strong. But for experienced divers ready to move beyond the familiar, the rewards are profound. Each descent carries a hint of the unknown. Each glance into the blue holds the prospect of an unexpected encounter.

In a country celebrated for marine biodiversity, the Banda Sea stands apart by virtue of its scale and spirit. It feels elemental - a meeting of fire, water and time. For those willing to venture into its wide horizons, the Banda Islands offer more than a dive trip. It's a journey, an adventure and an experience like no other. ■

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# THE GREAT AMERICAN

## DIVE TOUR

PART  
TWO

This year, the United States of America celebrates its 250th anniversary. For the country this is a milestone year, one that will be marked with celebrations and events throughout the land. For divers, this is an opportunity to explore the best scuba-diving opportunities the country has to offer. This is the second of a four-part series that will introduce you to the wide variety of dives that can be experienced right here in the USA

In this article we will explore some of the most iconic, interesting and popular shipwrecks lying in the waters of the United States. Some of these ships went to the bottom in tragic circumstances, while others were purpose-sunk to enhance the marine environment and to generate diving and other economic opportunities. Regardless of how a vessel ends up below the waves, each has a story to tell and divers who explore these submerged hulks are fortunate to experience the next chapter in the lives of these ships.

The Atlantic Ocean off the North Carolina coast is often referred to as the Graveyard of the Atlantic. Here, scuba divers can find dozens of ships resting on the bottom, including German U-Boats sunk in World War Two, pirate ships from the heyday of piracy, freighters, tankers and even the famous wreck of the Monitor Iyn 16 miles off Cape Hatteras at a depth of roughly 230ft-240ft.



Wreckage of the German U-boat U-352 in the Graveyard of the Atlantic



North Carolina's USCG Spar wreck is colorfully adorned with marine life

The Monitor is a designated National Marine Sanctuary and special permits are required to dive it, along with technical diving experience. But recreational divers can explore the wreck of the U-352, a German U-boat sunk by the United States Coast Guard on 9 May 1942, that lies listing to one side in about 115ft of water. The U-352 was the first German submarine sunk by a Coast Guard vessel in World War Two. Divers who visit this wreck are witnesses to the horrors of war as they swim over damaged portions of the hull now covered in marine growth more than eight decades after the ship went to the bottom of the Atlantic.

The wrecks of the Papoose, Aeolus, Indra, CaribSea and the USCG SPAR are just a few of the wrecks visited by dive boats operating in the area. Each of these sunken vessels, whether they lie in deep water or nearer to the shore, have a unique and fascinating history, stories from the past that now belong to the sea.

Perhaps the wreck with the most colorful history in the North Carolina area is the wreck of the Queen Anne's Revenge. Lying in about 30ft of murky inshore water about a mile out of Beaufort Inlet, this is the flagship of Blackbeard the Pirate's armada of rogue vessels that was lost after running aground while fleeing the authorities in June of 1718. The Queen Anne's Revenge was lost to history until 1996 when its pile of wreckage was discovered by a company called Intersal, Inc. They had been hired by North Carolina Underwater Branch to search for the remains of the ship. Cannons and a multitude of artifacts have been recovered from the site over the years and researchers strongly believe that the wreckage belongs to Blackbeard's ship. Occasionally programs are offered to divers who may obtain a special permit to visit this protected and very historic site. ▶



Exploring the Spiegel Grove in the days when it was lying on its side



Christopher inside the wreck of the North Carolina's CaribSea



Wreckage from the Miss Louise off Destin, Florida



Divers explore the wreck of the Cayman Salvager in Key West

**“ Most divers visiting this wreck only explore the superstructure of the carrier’s island, but even just this area provides enough adventure for many visits to this grand wreck! ”**

The state of Florida has a very active artificial reef program. Along the Atlantic coast, through the Florida Keys and along the Gulf shores of the panhandle, numerous ships have been purposely sunk providing a veritable playground for divers.

In Key Largo, the USS Spiegel Grove (LSD-32) measures 510 feet in length and sits in 130ft of water. Once the largest vessel ever intentionally sunk, the Spiegel Grove is now legendary with Florida Keys divers. On 17 May 2002, she sank upside down prematurely on the Dixie Shoals off Key Largo. Several weeks later, salvage crews managed to turn the wreck onto her side and within a week, 1,000 divers had visited the brand-new wreck. Those early divers were fortunate to see the wreck lying on her starboard side because three years later, Hurricane Dennis shifted the entire wreck onto her keel, right side up, as she was originally intended to be sunk!

On a recent visit, we descended the down line on one of the many mooring balls on the wreck, and the enormity of the ship became apparent in the clear 80-degree C water. Indeed, the wreck disappears off the edges of visibility, a ghostly structure beckoning divers to wander beyond their abilities. With strong currents and deep water, divers should have advanced certification to explore this wreck. A dive guide is a good idea for first time Spiegel divers.

There are other wrecks off the shores of Key Largo, including the twin US Coast Guard Cutters Bibb and Duane. Both were sunk within a day, and very nearby of each other on 27-28 November 1987, one mile south of Molasses reef in 130ft of water. These two ships are now on final duty resting alongside of each other and both make for fascinating dives.

In Key West we find the wreck of the USNS Gen. Hoyt S Vandenberg, sunk on 27 May 2009, and now enjoying fame as a world-class dive site. The wreck sits upright in 140ft of water but is reachable in about 80ft of water. With almost 80-foot visibility and no current on our dives, we were able to explore the entire length of the 522-foot vessel. Much of the ship’s superstructure remains, and large holes have been cut to provide for easy penetrations. The ship’s radar domes were left on the vessel when she was put to the bottom, but these spider-web shaped structures are falling apart quickly.

Off the Florida Panhandle, several notable shipwrecks are resting on the bottom waiting to be explored by divers out of Panama City, Pensacola and Destin.

The USS Oriskany, a 911-foot-long aircraft carrier, was sunk on 17 May 2006, 22.5 nautical miles southeast off Pensacola Pass at a depth of 212ft. At the time of her sinking, she was the first naval warship and largest artificial ▶



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reef ever to be intentionally sunk in US coastal waters. After two decades of submersion, the wreck is covered in marine growth. Shellfish, corals and algae obscure much of the original metal. Robust schools of tropical fish swirl around the superstructure, evidence that the intention of the artificial reef program has been met.

The wreck of the USS Oriskany is enormous and most of it lies beneath the range of recreational scuba. The flight deck, for instance, is at around 140ft, the hangers around 165ft and the sand is 210ft or deeper in spots. Most divers visiting this wreck only explore the superstructure of the carrier's island, but even just this area provides enough adventure for many visits to this grand wreck!

About 45 miles to the east of Pensacola is the bustling seaside town of Destin, Florida. A number of intentionally sunk ships are reachable from Destin, including the Cyclops, Miss Louise, Big Dawg and Manta. However, the main event for shipwreck divers is due to arrive in Destin momentarily.

At the time of this writing, the famous luxury liner SS United States is being readied for deployment as an artificial reef off the Destin-Ft Walton area of the Florida Panhandle. The 990-foot liner, once known as America's Flagship and owner of the speed record for an Atlantic crossing that remains to this day, is being prepared in a boatyard in Mobile, Alabama, for its sinking. The date of the sinking remains uncertain, but late-2025 or early 2026 is the latest estimate.

Dive shops and charter boat captains are eager to see the vessel deployed underwater. Once sunk, the SS United States will become the largest artificial reef, outdoing the USS Oriskany. The addition of the SS United States to these Gulf waters is sure to catapult this area to a premier and much-sought-after dive destination.

The New York City area is not often thought of as a dive destination, but for years it was the epicenter for cold-water wreck diving. Iconic shipwrecks such as the USS San Diego, Oregon, Stolt D'Agali and U-853 are all authentic shipwrecks with fascinating histories and rewarding dive opportunities. And for divers unwilling to venture offshore, the wreck of a Revolutionary War-era British warship named the HMS Culloden sits 150 yards offshore in 15ft of water near Montauk, NY.



Florida Panhandle beaches are spectacular



Pompano Beach has many diver-friendly shipwrecks



The USCG Spar has become a thriving artificial reef for North Carolina



Exploring the HMS Culloden from the Revolutionary War off Long Island, New York

The Great Lakes have long been a favorite for wreck divers as well. A plethora of shipwrecks lie in the cold, freshwater graves of each of the five Great Lakes beckoning divers to visit, explore and photograph their bones. While there are far too many to name in this article, the NOAA Sanctuary in Thunder Bay, Michigan has over 100 wrecks and is a perfect dive location for all levels. As a result of the invasion of zebra mussels a number of years ago, the waters in the lakes are extremely clear and the wrecks have become tantalizingly exposed in the improved visibility.

Throughout all of North America, where there is water there are shipwrecks. A unique wreck dive exists off the big island of Hawaii that is not a ship at all.

On a recent dive, we descended 100ft to the decaying hulk of a sunken Corsair fighter plane. As we approached the wreck, a flood of thoughts washed over our brains. We imagined the final moments of this Corsair's last mission, and we contemplated the stark contrast between the ferocity of war and the serenity of this plane's final resting place. ▶

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The propeller is now home to corals and other marine growth



“ As we swam towards the front of the plane, we came across the broken blade of the large propeller and, with the metal skin eroded, the engine itself is visible ”

We swam slowly towards the skeletal remains of the sunken Corsair and immediately were struck at the small size of the plane. We had somehow imagined it to be bigger but here, in front of us, was a fuselage the size of a small bus with a broken-off wing to the side. Although a small site, the remains of the plane were teeming with life. This was literally an oasis of life in a featureless sandy bottom about 110ft below the surface. Schools of snapper, grunts and soldierfish have taken up residence here and in the distance a colony of garden eels, poking their heads out from the sand, seem to be keeping watch.

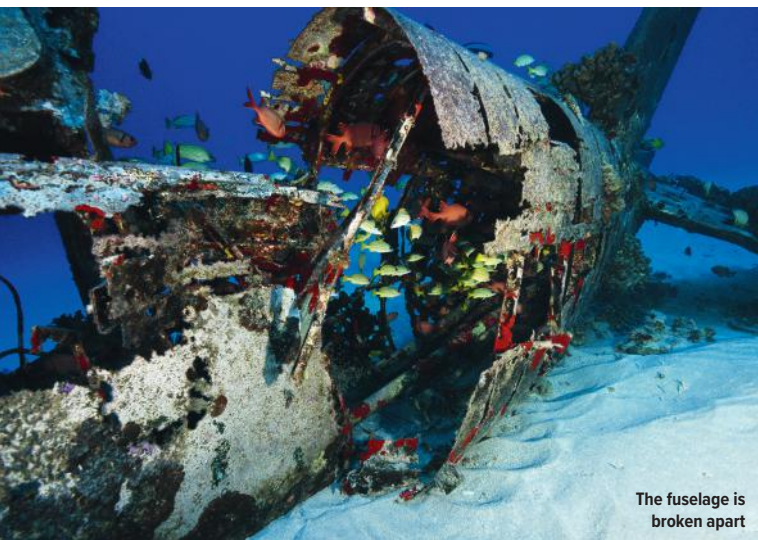
As we swam towards the front of the plane, we came across the broken blade of the large propeller and, with the metal skin eroded, the engine itself is visible. Hard corals are growing on various sections of the wreck. The plane is now a fully intact marine ecosystem.

Swimming over the wreck towards the tail end, we came across a large orange-colored frogfish, who seems to have taken a liking to the sunken plane and made it a home!

We concluded our dive on the sunken World War Two Corsair by swimming off into the sand to gaze upon the corpse of the plane from a distance. There, bathed in the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean and illuminated by the distant rays of the sun, the plane sits, a remnant from a time of turmoil and conflict. The sunken Corsair, a device of war designed for conflict, is now enveloped by quiet serenity and is home to a plethora of marine life. Peace has come to the Corsair and, as we begin our ascent, we wish her well.

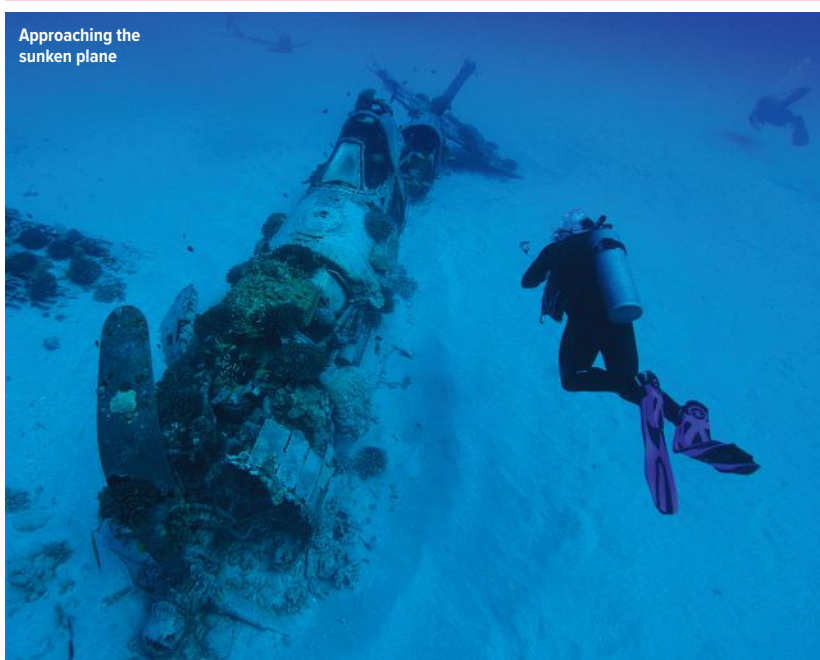
Every shipwreck has a story to tell. Scuba divers are fortunate to be able to explore these relics, learn their history and share those stories for future generations. ■

*NB: In our next installment of the Great American Dive, we'll explore some of the best dives in the United States designed around specific marine life encounters.*



The fuselage is broken apart

Mike explores the wreck of North Carolina's CaribSea



Approaching the sunken plane



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# LOVE

# THE PHILIPPINES

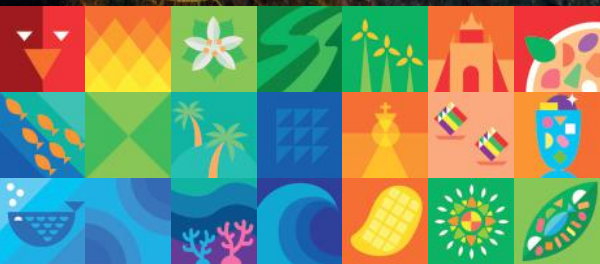


# 10

**Experiences you should consider on your future adventures!**

## **Travel hints and advice**

We deliver essential information to help plan your next trip



**LOVE**  
THE PHILIPPINES



**TPB**  
PHILIPPINES

# LOVE THE PHILIPPINES

**The Philippines is the most-visited country in Southeast Asia from the United States of America, drawing more than 1.1 million visitors annually!**

The secret to its success? Its sublime blend of world-class dive destinations, stunning nature, wide range of accommodation and activity options, unique culture, pleasant tropical climate, and friendly locals, many of whom speak fluent English, combined with convenient direct flights by Philippine Airlines from several major airport hubs, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, New York and Honolulu.

This sprawling archipelago boasts more than 7,600 islands, with more than 16,000 square miles of reef systems, which between them offer literally thousands of dive sites, from beginner-friendly shallow reefs to dramatic walls, thrilling drifts and historic shipwrecks sure to thrill even the most-jaded experienced diver.

The Philippines has the most marine biodiversity per mile of coastline than any other country on the planet, and you will encounter over 600 species of coral, which are home to more than 2,000 species of fish. From nudibranchs, frogfish, mantis shrimps and other critters to sea snakes, rays and sharks, not to mention six of the seven turtle species, you will be mesmerised by the spectacles that await you underwater. But it is not just the colorful coral reefs and walls, and the prolific marine life that draws divers to the Philippines. The country is also home to a veritable fleet of coral-encrusted shipwrecks – there are more than 11 World War Two Japanese supply ships and gunboats in Coron Bay, including the famed Irako and Olympia Maru, as well as deeper, more-challenging wrecks in Subic Bay, such as the armored cruiser USS New York, which went down in 1891.

Thanks to its location in the heart of the renowned Coral Triangle, as well as its sunken array of wartime casualties, the Philippines is recognised as a diving hotspot on a global scale, and has been the recipient of several high-profile dive awards, including being named the World's Leading Dive Destination in the 2025 World Travel Awards, and the 'Best Value Dive Destination - Pacific and Indian Oceans' at the 2026 Scuba Diving Readers' Choice Awards. If you haven't been yet, isn't it about time you planned your first visit? It will surely not be your last... you too will learn to 'Love Diving in the Philippines'.



The many islands are surrounded by crystal clear warm waters



The Dinagyang Festival is an annual religious and cultural festival in Iloilo City



Fort Santiago located in Manila, Philippines is a popular tourist hotspot steeped in history



Warty Frogfish

# DIVE MAP OF THE PHILIPPINES



**LEGEND**

- Dive Site
- International Airport
- Domestic Airport
- Hyperbaric Chamber



## LIST OF HYPERBARIC CHAMBER SYSTEMS IN THE PHILIPPINES (As of 2 April 2026)

- 1 Asian Hyperbaric Healthcare Inc.  
Mandaluyong, Metro Manila
- 2 Advance Hyperbaric Life Support Inc.  
Quezon City, Metro Manila
- 3 Victoriano Luna General Hospital and Medical Center  
Quezon City, Metro Manila
- 4 NAVSOCOM Sangley Point  
Cavite City, Cavite
- 5 Hyperbaric Medicine and Wound Healing Center  
Batangas City, Batangas
- 6 Ospital ng Palawan  
Puerto Princesa City, Palawan
- 7 Philippine Navy Transportable Recompression Chamber System  
Puerto Princesa City, Palawan
- 8 Maayo Well  
Mandaue City, Cebu
- 9 TIEZA Hyperbaric Chamber  
Mandaue City, Cebu
- 10 Panglao Rural Health Unit  
Panglao, Bohol
- 11 Southern Philippines Medical Center  
Davao City, Davao del Sur

NOTE: This map is only a Tourist Map of the Republic of the Philippines. The information contained here is used only as a functional tool to provide basic tourist information for travelers. It cannot be used as an official reference.

The content in this brochure is owned by the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines.

All photos were used with permission from the owners and the Philippine Commission on Sports Scuba Diving (PCSSD).

Information is accurate as of April 2026.



## PALAWAN

Palawan is rightly ranked among the most-famous diving areas of the Philippines, because it offers so much choice to divers as it is home to virtually every kind of diving imaginable - whether you are a raw novice or an experienced veteran, you will find something to get your juices flowing. Awesome macro critters, enticing caverns, caves and swim-throughs, and colorful fringing reefs can be found in the warm, clear waters surrounding the thousands of remote islands ringed with white sand, and lush tropical jungles scaling the karst limestone cliffs.

More-experienced divers have the added attraction of a sunken fleet of World War Two Japanese shipwrecks at Coron, which includes the 482-foot-long refrigeration ship *Irako*, the 525-foot-long tanker *Okikawa Maru*, and the 400-foot-long freighter *Olympia Maru*, all of which are smothered in coral growth and are home to myriad species of fish.

The jewel in the crown of this area is without a doubt the remote waters of UNESCO World Heritage site Tubbataha Reef- only accessible via liveaboard from mid-March to mid-June- which are host to some seriously impressive walls with sometimes strong currents, frenetic pelagic action - including whale sharks, manta rays, tiger sharks and hammerhead sharks - and hectic cleaning stations, all showcased by incredible visibility.

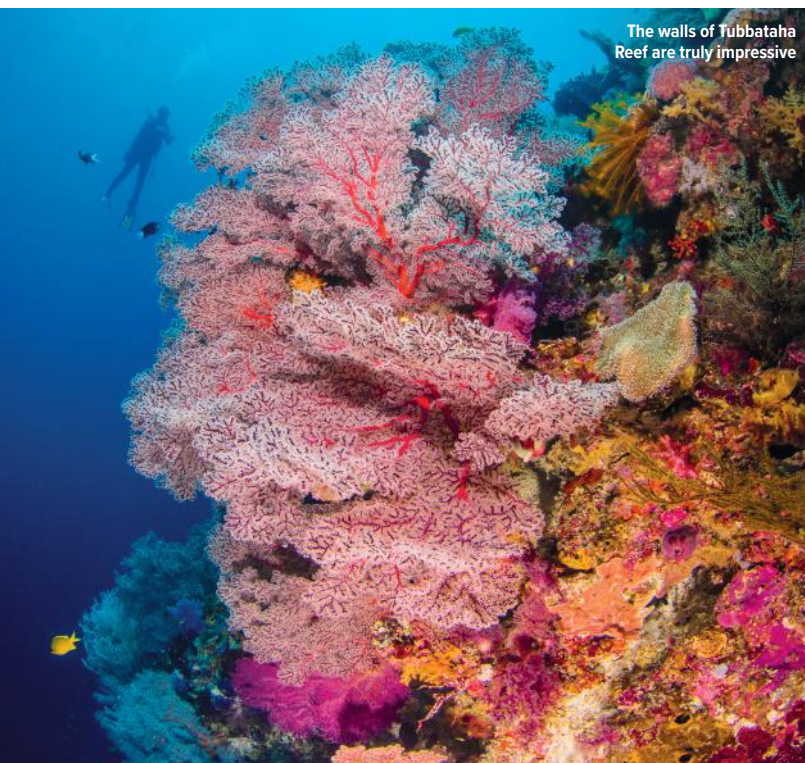


The Infiniti liveaboard docked on the Tubbataha Reefs  
© David Fleetham / Atlantis Dive Resorts and Liveaboards

## CEBU

Cebu can be found in the very heart of the Philippines, and its waters are home to some of the most-famous diving areas in the country. Moalboal is renowned for its mesmerising 'sardine runs' at the aptly named Sardine Point, alongside masses of reef fish and turtles on the dramatic walls at Pescador Island. On Malapascua, there are daily thresher shark sightings at Kimud Shoal for early risers, while Gato Island is a sanctuary for reef sharks and sea snakes.

Lesser-known than their more-famous siblings, Mactan and Lapu-Lapu provide the perfect introduction to diving for beginners, although there are also sites for advanced divers, such as the 100ft deep Marigondon Cave, a cavern which boasts some huge gorgonian seafans. If you are a fan of the 'big stuff', Oslob and Sumilon are known globally for their whale shark sightings.



The walls of Tubbataha Reef are truly impressive

The world-renowned Thresher shark



## NEGROS ORIENTAL: DAUIN AND APO ISLAND

Negros Oriental, particularly the coastal town of Dauin, is a premier Philippine diving destination known for world-class muck diving on volcanic sand slopes featuring an array of macro life, including frogfish, flamboyant cuttlefish, mantis shrimps, ghost pipefish and nudibranchs. At sites such as Dauin North, San Miguel and Masaplod North you will soon fill your memory card with stills and videos of the crazy critters that inhabit the area.

The area is also known as being an easy access point to the marine sanctuary of Apo Island, best known for high-energy sites such as Coconut Point (also known as The Washing Machine), Chapel Point and the Sanctuary, which play host to its huge population of sea turtles, mindblowing coral gardens, stunning walls and, at certain locations, fierce currents that can attract in large pelagics.



Interesting underwater scenery



Freediver with giant school of sardines

## MINDORO: PUERTO GALERA AND APO REEF

Mindoro has been called a ‘diver’s paradise’, and quite rightly so, as its waters are home to the world-renowned Apo Reef – the second largest coral reef in the world – that is host to some 75% of the world’s coral species. Located some 18 miles from Occidental Mindoro, two triangular-shaped atoll-like coral formations – each with their own lagoon – are separated by a sandy channel that bottoms out at 100ft, and the entire site is smothered in coral and sponge growth. Being a protected marine park, and away from the madding crowds, the deep waters surrounding Apo Reef bring scores of pelagics, including tuna, barracuda, trevally and jacks, alongside majestic manta rays, dynamic dolphins and various shark species, such as thresher sharks and hammerhead sharks. Particular hotspot dive sites including North Wall, Shark Ridge, Apo 29, Hunter’s Rock, and Binangaan Drop-Off.

This is also where visitors can find Puerto Galera, often referred to as the ‘diving capital of the Philippines’. Another must-experience is Verde Island, in the midst of the biodiversity hotspot known as the Coral Triangle, with excellent 100-foot-plus visibility and colorful corals, the Alma Jane Wreck, an artificial reef smothered in coral growth, Manila Channel, for a current-swept drift dive, and The Canyons, a high-energy drift dive known for shoals of barracuda and jacks.



The wreck of the Alma Jane



A tiny squid drifting in the dark, photographed on a blackwater dive

## ANILAO, BATANGAS

Anilao, located in Batangas under three hours from Manila, is regarded as one of the premier muck-diving locations of the Philippines. Get your macro lens attached and set your sights on nudibranchs, frogfish, rhinopias, pipefish, octopus, and all manner of weird-and-wonderful critters - Basura and Secret Bay are sites that are particularly good for macro life.

It’s not all macro, though – at Twin Rocks you can find two pinnacles smothered in soft corals and often visited by schools of barracuda and jacks, Cathedral Rock is famous for a stone cross placed between two large boulders – if you can see it for all of the marine life swirling around, and Mainit Point, where you can get your pulse racing drifting along current-swept reefs looking for pelagics.

Close to Anilao you also have Sombrero Island, which offers beautiful coral gardens to explore.

The waters of Anilao are proving popular with exponents of blackwater diving, where divers hang in mid-water to closely observe and photograph bizarre larval creatures that emerge from the deep ocean at night.



Rhinopias



Schooling jacks number in their hundreds

A turtle poses for a photograph on the reef



## SIQUIJOR

Siquijor, with its blend of marine sanctuaries, coral-covered walls and huge amounts of marine life offers excellent diving for all levels of diver. The dramatic Paliton Wall has a spectacular drop-off down to some 165ft, which has several caverns and a larger main cave, while the three sanctuaries – Maite, Tubod and Caticugan – blend fields of dense coral and sponge growth, plenty of schools of fish, numerous turtles, and the occasional sighting of frogfish or mandarin fish, alongside other macro critters. Coral Garden, as you'd expect with a name like that, is known for a vast array of hard and soft corals!

Manta ray cruising off Ticao Island



## BOHOL

Bohol is one of those locations that has something for everyone, from novice divers taking their first tentative fin-steps into diving, and experienced divers looking for their next fix.

Top sites include the marine sanctuary of Balicasag Island, which is well known for its dramatic walls, huge schools of jacks, scores of sea turtles, and amazing macro life, and Pamilacan Island, where the Spanish Tower is a prime spot to encounter whale sharks and manta rays. Another hotspot, Panglao Island itself, offers easy access to colorful reefs, reef sharks, rays, and night diving options, while Cabilao Island promises the chance of hammerhead sharks and, at the opposite end of the scale, pygmy seahorses, and Napaling Reef has a gigantic sardine run that is accessible straight from the shore.

### *Did you know?*

The Philippines boasts the world's second-largest coral reef area in Southeast Asia (approx. 26,000 sq. km) and sits at the center of the Coral Triangle, harboring over 500 hard coral species and nearly 1,800 reef fish species!



Fields of healthy corals await divers

## MANTA BOWL, TICAO IN MASBATE

Many sites in the Philippines are spoken of in hallowed terms, but Manta Bowl, known locally as Buntod Tacdogan, perhaps deserves all the accolades more than most. An underwater seamount located off the coast of Ticao Island, it lies in the middle of the Ticao Pass, which separates Ticao Island from the Bicol Peninsula. It plateaus out between 65ft-100ft deep, but is surrounded by abyssal deep water, and is a haven for pelagic marine life seeking out the numerous cleaning stations that lie within. While numerous species can be seen at this site, as the name suggests, it is renowned for the hordes of manta rays which flock to be given a once-over by the cleaner wrasse. More than 240 individual animals have been recorded at this location.



Divers exploring an encrusted shipwreck

## SUBIC BAY

When it comes to wreck diving in the Philippines, Subic Bay is one of the premier wreck diving hotspots, featuring numerous shipwrecks, as well as artificial reefs, dating from the Spanish-American War to the Vietnam War. Key sites include the massive 383-foot-long armored cruiser USS New York, dating back to 1891 and now lying between 60ft-100ft and featuring eight-inch turreted deck guns. There is also the El Capitan, or USS Majaba, a 490-foot-long World War Two freighter sitting on its side and open for penetration for suitably trained divers, and the Douglas Skyraider, a relatively intact American attack aircraft now sitting at 118ft - visiting divers can still make out the cockpit instruments, radios, and even a parachute pack in the rear section. In shallower waters, you can find the San Quentin, a Spanish gunboat scuttled in 1898 and now a vibrant artificial reef covered in coral growth, the Landing Ship Tank (LST), the Japanese patrol boat Banshu Maru, and the F4 Phantom plane wreck. However, it is not all man-made attractions. There are also some stunning reef sites, including Nabasan Reef, Airpond Reef, and Canyons Reef, which boast spectacular corals and marine life.

## SOGOD BAY

Sogod Bay, located in Southern Leyte, is one of the more-recent additions to the Philippines menu of dive destinations, and it is best known for its pristine reefs and nutrient-rich waters, which are home to everything from tiny pygmy seahorses to giant whale sharks.

The Napantao Marine Sanctuary, off Panoan Island, features a dramatic wall dropping to 164ft, which is covered in giant gorgonian fans and soft corals, and Tangkaan Point, or Medicare North, known for varied, shallow coral gardens that are popular with turtles, making it a favorite for photographers.

Malibog Muck is a black sand site loaded with macro life, while Limasawa Island, particular the sites Adriana and Zack's Cove, boast vibrant, colorful walls with large table corals, tiny nudibranchs, and the occasional hammerhead shark. But if you want the best chance of seeing a true giant - whale sharks - you want to head to Sunok Point (November to May offer the best chance of a sighting).



Shaun the sheep nudibranch



© Raechel Romero

**“The diversity here is staggering. You could spend one to two weeks a year exploring the Philippines for the next decade and still only scratch the surface”**

I love diving the Philippines because, from the West Coast of the USA, you can be in the heart of the Coral Triangle in under 12 hours - one of the most biodiverse marine regions on Earth and a true hotspot for divers of all levels. From Manila, incredible diving is just a short journey away. Within a few hours, you can reach Anilao, known worldwide as the critter and blackwater capital of the Philippines.

Head in another direction and you'll arrive in Puerto Galera, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, offering a vibrant mix of macro life and thriving coral reefs. Just offshore lies Verde Island, often called the 'center of the center' of marine biodiversity, where ancient barrel sponges and healthy reefs support dense schools of reef fish. The diversity here is staggering. You could spend one to two weeks a year exploring the Philippines for the next decade and still only scratch the surface. From the famous thresher sharks of Malapascua to remote, liveaboard-only destinations like Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, there is truly something for every diver.

What makes the experience even more special is the people. English is widely spoken, making travel seamless, and the cultural ties to the United States create a familiar sense of connection. From the moment you arrive, you feel welcomed. Even a layover in Manila can become part of the adventure, with incredible food, culture, and energy that set the tone for what's to come underwater.

### Annie Crawley

Underwater photographer and film-maker, author and ocean advocate

# TOP 10 THINGS TO DO IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is an island nation that offers a multitude of opportunities for adventure on non-diving days – here are 10 of the top experiences you should consider

1

## SADDLE UP TO EXPLORE BY BIKE

In Batanes, you can explore some truly scenic bike routes – the popular Batan Island Loop offers over 25 miles of coastal roads and rolling hills, and takes in Basco, Mahatao and Uyugan. Be warned, though, the route includes some challenging ascents, as there is over 1,500 feet of elevation gain on the loop. There are plenty of easier route options which are just as stunning.

2

## MARVEL AT THE BANAUE RICE TERRACES

Often referred to as the ‘eighth wonder of the world’, these 2,000-year-old terraces were meticulous hand-carved into the mountains and used to cultivate rice by capturing water from mountain rainforests. These, along with other Ifugao terraces, served as the scenic backdrop for The Garden in Avengers: Infinity War and Endgame. Hire a guide to get the best trekking and educational experience.

3

## GO OFFROAD AND HIKE TO A MOUNTAIN LAKE

In Pampanga, you can take part in an exciting day trip to Mount Pinatubo that incorporates a one-and-a-half hour offroad adventure through ‘Crow Valley’ in an open-top Jeep, where you’ll see volcanic mudflow formations and the famed Toblerone Hills, and a two-hour hike that involves crossing small streams. The destination awaiting you is a turquoise caldera lake.

4

## VENTURE UP THE PUERTO PRINCESA UNDERGROUND RIVER

A UNESCO World Heritage site, known as one of the ‘new 7 wonders of nature’, this navigable underground river flows through a massive, sprawling limestone cave system dotted with massive stalactites and stalagmites. You will board a small, manned paddle boat for a tour inside the pitch-black cave. You can also add on a tranquil tour through the local mangroves.

5

## DRIVE UP A VOLCANO!

In Albay, you have the opportunity to climb aboard a 4x4 ATV or strap into an all-terrain buggy and make an eye-opening 18-mile, five-hour offroad adventure all the way to – almost – the top of Mt Mayon. As a finale, it is possible to hike to a location offering views from the summit, and you get amazing views of Legazpi City. There are four less-strenuous trail options on offer for those without the stamina – or time – to do the main event.

6

## SPEND A DAY ISLAND HOPPING

Famed for its dramatic limestone cliffs, tranquil lagoons and hidden beaches, joining a tour that takes in several different locations in El Nido makes for an action-packed day of exploration. There are four main ‘tours’, taking in sights such as Big Lagoon, Secret Lagoon, Seven Commandos Beach, Snake Island, Matinloc Shrine, Pasandigan Beach and the scenic Cadlao Lagoon. Coron is another famous island-hopping hotspot, with half-day and full-day adventures to the likes of Kayangan Lake, Twin Lagoon, Barracuda Lake, and the Skeleton Wreck.

7

## VISIT THE CHOCOLATE HILLS IN BOHOL

This unique geological formation comprises of more than 1,200 symmetrical, cone-shaped hills that turn brown during the dry season (typically late-February to May), hence the name ‘Chocolate Hills’. For the best views, visit the main viewpoint in Carmen, which has a viewing deck. If you want a bit more of an adrenaline rush, you can also try zip-lining here.

8

## CANYONING IN KAWASAN FALLS, CEBU

An adrenaline-filled activity involving hiking, rappelling, and cliff jumping into warm waters. The experience begins in the mountains of Badian and descends toward the famous turquoise Kawasan Falls.

9

## SURF IN SIARGAO

Siargao is the ‘surfing capital of the Philippines’ and is home to the world-renowned Cloud 9 barreling right-hander wave in General Luna, which attracts surfers – and beach lovers – from around the world. Even if you are not a surfer, it is worth heading to this spectacular location to watch others ‘hang ten’, or you can even grab a board and give it a go yourself on smaller, more-accessible beginner waves.

10

## ONE FOR THE BIRDS

Palawan is known as the Philippines ‘last frontier’, and the reason it is such a world-class birding destination is due to its biogeographical wlink to Sundaland, which means its fauna is more-closely related to Borneo than the rest of the Philippines. It is home to more than 30 endemic bird species found nowhere else, including the blue paradise flycatcher, Palawan frogmouth, Philippine cockatoo, and the Palawan peacock-pheasant.



1



6



2



7



3



8



4



9



5





10


# TRAVEL HINTS & ADVICE


Traveling to the Philippines is an adventure, but that doesn't mean it has to be difficult - here we deliver some useful information that will help you plan your next trip


## GENERAL INFORMATION


 **Entry requirements** - A passport with six months validity is mandatory, along with a return ticket. A free 30-day visa is available for most nationalities. You must have a QR code to show that you have registered on the e-travel system ([www.etravel.gov.ph](http://www.etravel.gov.ph)) within the 72 hours before your arrival into the Philippines

 **Electric supply** - 220V, with A-, B- and C-style plugs.

 **Currency** - PHP (Philippine peso), though credit cards are accepted in many resorts and on liveboards.

 **Language** - Filipino is the native language, but English is widely spoken.

 **Connectivity** - WiFi is available in hotels and resorts, but can be somewhat slow. Purchase a local SIM card or activate an eSIM for better data connectivity.

 **Health** - Use mosquito repellent, and wear long sleeves and pants in the evenings, or while trekking through jungle areas. Do not drink tap water - stick to bottled or filtered water.

## WHEN TO GO

Diving is good all year round in the Philippines, with average air temperatures of 86 degrees F and water temperatures between 78-86 degrees F. There are two distinct seasons - the dry season (December to May), which is the best period to visit, and the wet season (June to November). The heaviest rainfall is usually expected in July and August.

## SPEAK THE LANGUAGE

It is always nice to attempt at least a few words in the local language, and while English is widely spoken, here are some of the most useful:

**Hello** - same as in English!

**Paalam** - Goodbye

**Paki-usap** - Please

**Salamat** - Thank you

**Oo** - Yes

**Hindi** - No

**Mabuhay!** - Welcome/Long Live/Cheers!

## GETTING THERE

Travel to the Philippines from the United States, and Canada is very



**Philippine Airlines**

straightforward, as Philippine Airlines (PAL) operates direct flight services to Manila out of Los Angeles (2x-daily), San Francisco (daily), Seattle (5x-weekly), New York (3x-weekly), Honolulu (5x-weekly), Toronto (4x-weekly) and Vancouver (daily). PAL recently acquired a fleet of Airbus 350-1000, one of the most-advanced long-haul passenger aircrafts, to service the North America-Manila route. Once in the country, traveling around the islands is convenient with PAL's comprehensive domestic flight network, and other available flights, and transport services from ferries, buses to car rentals.

**Hotline: +1800-4359725**

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



Coral whip gobies

## BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Atlantis Dive Resorts  
(Puerto Galera & Dauin/Dumaguete) & Liveboards  
[www.atlantishotel.com](http://www.atlantishotel.com)

Balicasag Island & Dive Resort  
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[www.balicasagislanddive resort.com](http://www.balicasagislanddive resort.com)

Boracay Adventures Travel and Tours  
[www.boracayadventures.com](http://www.boracayadventures.com)

Buceo Anilao  
(Batangas)  
[www.buceoanilao.com](http://www.buceoanilao.com)

Casalay Boutique Villas & Dive Resort  
(Puerto Galera)  
[www.casalay.ph](http://www.casalay.ph)

Crystal Blue Resort  
(Anilao, Batangas)  
[www.divecbr.com](http://www.divecbr.com)

Earth Explorers Dive + Travel  
[www.instagram.com/earthexplorers](http://www.instagram.com/earthexplorers)

El Galleon Resort / Asia Divers  
(Puerto Galera)  
[www.asiadivers.com](http://www.asiadivers.com)

Garden of Eden Dive Resort  
(Puerto Galera)  
[www.goeresort.de](http://www.goeresort.de)

Kasai Village Dive Resort  
(Moalboal, Cebu)  
[www.kasai village.com](http://www.kasai village.com)

Kokays Maldito Beach Resort and Diving Shop  
(Malapascua, Cebu)  
[www.kokaysmalditodiveresort.com](http://www.kokaysmalditodiveresort.com)

Lalaguna Villas Luxury Dive Resort & Spa  
(Puerto Galera)  
[www.lalagunavillas.com](http://www.lalagunavillas.com)

Magic Resorts Philippines  
(Moalboal, Cebu & Anda, Bohol)  
[www.magicisland.online](http://www.magicisland.online)

Marco Vincent  
(Puerto Galera)  
[www.marcovincent.com](http://www.marcovincent.com)

M/Y Resolute  
(Liveboard)  
[www.dive-resolute.com](http://www.dive-resolute.com)

Scandi Divers Resort  
(Puerto Galera)  
[www.scandidivers.com](http://www.scandidivers.com)

Sea Explorers Philippines  
[www.sea-explorers.com](http://www.sea-explorers.com)

Silver Reef Dive Resort  
(Dauin/Dumaguete)  
[www.silverreefdiveresort.com](http://www.silverreefdiveresort.com)



Photographer capturing a freediver swimming alongside a whale shark in Donsol, Sorsogon

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# LOVE DIVING



# THE PHILIPPINES



**7,641**

PHILIPPINE  
ISLANDS

**22,549**

MILES OF  
COASTLINE

**10,000**

SQ MILES OF  
CORAL REEFS

**3,053**

SPECIES  
OF FISH

**ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING  
DIVE AND TOURIST DESTINATIONS**

# #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 26ft 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.



# SCUBA DIVER Q&A

## STEVE KAPLAN PT II

We chat to Steve Kaplan, the all-action ex-Navy SEAL behind Trident Adventures, which has brought – among other things – snorkeling, scuba diving, DPV diving, heli-diving and even ‘be a Navy SEAL for the day’ to Hawaii

Photographs courtesy of Trident Adventures and Stuart Philpott



**Q: While not being dive-related, we can imagine plenty of divers who would relish being a ‘Navy SEAL for the day’. Tell us more about this, it sounds like the ultimate way to spend a day topside after a week of diving!**

A: ‘Navy SEAL for the Day’ is exactly what it sounds like, a full-scale, high-speed evolution that blends aviation, professional range instruction, and ocean operations into one non-stop day. It is not a themed experience, it is a real mission-style adventure, and the biggest difference is that guests have Navy SEALs with them in every phase, from the first briefing to the final recovery. The goal is to give people a taste of what that world feels like, the adrenaline, the precision, the teamwork, and the confidence that comes from doing something far outside the normal comfort zone, while still keeping it professional, controlled, and safe.

The day begins on the South Shore with a private helicopter tour that encircles the entire island. This is not a passive sightseeing flight, it is a low-level, adrenaline-pumping, doors-off ride that feels like something out of the Teams. You are skimming coastlines, hugging ridgelines, flying over remote valleys, and seeing Hawaii the way very few people ever will. We mount cameras everywhere, even on the helicopter alone there are eight dedicated GoPros capturing every angle, and that is before you even count the cameras on the range, the boat, and underwater. From the start, it feels cinematic, because it is.

After the flight, we land at our private range location and the pace stays high. Guests shoot a wide variety of firearms across different calibers with Navy SEAL instructors coaching them the entire time. What makes it special is the transformation, you can literally take someone from zero to hero in a couple of hours. We start with the fundamentals in a controlled environment, then progress into more dynamic,



Leaping from a helicopter

real-world movement-based drills, always supervised, always coached, always safety first. Most people shoot more in two hours than they would in weeks, and we have a dedicated support team whose only job is to keep the range running smoothly, including constantly loading magazines, so guests can stay locked in and focused. Meals and drinks are included, and the amount of high-quality video and content people walk away with is incredible.

Then the experience shifts back to the ocean, and this is where it becomes pure Trident. We take the helicopter from the North Shore to the South Shore, and we helicopter cast into the water where the guest’s dive gear is staged and waiting, perfectly sized and prepped for their body. From there we transition immediately into underwater travel using diver propulsion vehicles, navigating as a team to another destination while the dive boat is standing by for recovery. Depending on the guest’s interests and experience level, we can incorporate spearfishing, and we often finish on an underwater shipwreck off Waikiki, which is an unreal way to end the day.



Briefing pre-heli jump



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Trident Adventures' dive boat

What makes it the ultimate topside day for divers is that it is not one activity, it is a full spectrum adventure. Doors-off helicopter, SEAL-led range training, helicopter cast, underwater navigation, and ocean recovery, all in one day, with Navy SEALs guiding the guest through every phase. It is fast, it is intense, it is unforgettable, and it is the kind of day that people talk about for the rest of their lives.

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

A: My most-memorable diving experience was not about depth, or a rare sighting, it was about watching someone reclaim a part of their life they thought was gone forever. His name is Seth, and he is a quadriplegic who called me with one goal - he wanted to snorkel, not for fun, but to conquer a fear that had controlled him for 17 years. As a teenager, Seth broke his neck after diving headfirst off a boat into a shallow sandbar. It happened in the water, he almost drowned, and his life changed instantly. From that moment on, the ocean was not freedom to him, it was trauma, and he carried that fear for almost two decades.

When Seth called, he told me he was newly married to an incredible woman, and he wanted to get into the ocean with her, even if it was only snorkeling, just to prove to himself that fear would not win. I understood him immediately, because I know what it feels like to be afraid of the water, and I know how deep those fears can run. Then I said something that shocked him. I told him, snorkeling is stupid.

The second I said it, I could hear his heart drop through the phone. He went quiet, and I could feel him taking it personally, because he was not asking for entertainment, he was asking for a victory. He told me his wife had already said it was a bad idea, and now he thought I was confirming what he feared most, that it was impossible.

I stopped him right there. I told him, no, you are misunderstanding me. It is not stupid because of what you are trying to do. It is stupid because you are capable of so much more than you think, and I refuse to let you aim small. I told him, we are not just going to snorkel, we are going to jump from a helicopter and scuba dive.



Steve on the helicopter



Steve with a huge turtle

That is when Seth broke down. Through tears he tried to remind me that he could not move his arms or legs, he could not feel them, and he kept asking how he could possibly jump and dive. I told him something I fully believed, you do not have to do it alone, my team and I will carry you through every phase of this. What Seth did not know yet is that Trident is not just an adventure company, it is a team of highly trained professionals who live for moments like this, moments where someone finds their courage again.

When the day came, we flew Seth and his wife on an incredible helicopter ride, and you could see the fear and the excitement mixed together in his face. Then the Trident team went to work. With two cast masters, myself and Brian Phillips, we physically lifted Seth inside the helicopter and ▶



## 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 ”

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helped him 'jump' with us, fully supported, highly positively buoyant, protected with handholds around his body. In the water we had a dedicated five-person safety team, all equipped with DPVs so they could keep their hands free, stay locked in around him, and control every movement, every second. Everything was calm, deliberate, and professional, because Seth's trust was the most-important thing in that moment.

Then we took him scuba diving with his wife. We transitioned him into the dive with a team of adaptive-rated dive professionals, towing him smoothly and keeping him stable, comfortable, and safe, all while giving him the freedom to experience the ocean, not as a threat, but as a gift. Seth dove hand in hand with his bride, on his honeymoon, and he saw eagle rays, massive green sea turtles, and the full beauty of Hawaii underwater. I will never forget the look on his face, because it was not just joy, it was relief, like something heavy had finally been set down.

There is nothing like lifting a man out of an electric wheelchair, helping him jump from a helicopter, then giving him the gift of breathing underwater beside the woman he loves. That day did not just change Seth's relationship with the ocean, it changed what he believed about himself. And the truth is, none of it happens without the Trident team, without professionals who are skilled enough, trained enough, and committed enough to make something extraordinary feel safe. Seth came to us wanting to snorkel, and he left having done something that should have been impossible. That is why I built Trident Adventures, because adventure is incredible, but helping someone reclaim their life is unforgettable.

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

A: My worst diving memory happened about seven years ago, right after I retired from the SEAL Teams, and just before I started building Trident Adventures. At the time I was also working on the set of Hawaii Five-O as their Navy SEAL technical advisor. I was also working as a stuntman,



Steve with a group of heli-divers



Steve on a dive

and occasional actor, which I am terrible at. One day Alex O'Loughlin, the main actor who played Steve McGarrett, and a certified diver, asked if I would take him and a friend diving at Shark's Cove on the North Shore. So, I went out with them and another retired SEAL, Jim Beck. Shark's Cove is a popular summer dive site when the ocean is calm, but in winter it becomes one of the most-powerful surf zones in the world. It was a rare flat spring day, so we decided to do a shore dive.

Alex's friend was a Discover Scuba Diver, so I kept him close and we stayed in open water near the entrances to the caves and lava tubes that Shark's Cove is famous for. Everything was calm, clear, and beautiful, and then in an instant it turned into chaos. One moment we had visibility and control, and the next moment it was nothing but white water, and I was being pulled straight into the cave system. It went from sunlight to pitch black immediately. I found myself trapped inside a narrow lava tube, about four feet across, with violent water surging through it like a river. I could feel the jagged rock biting into my hands, my arms, and the side of my neck as I pinned myself in place, posting my fins and boots against the walls just to keep from being swept deeper. I had no idea what was happening, but this strange calm came over me, my heart rate slowed down, and time felt like it stretched out. I was not thinking in panic, I was thinking in problems, I just needed to stay alive and keep the diver with me alive.

Then the current switched. It reversed direction so hard it felt like the ocean was breathing through the tube. A second later I was hit by a body. In total darkness, I could not see who it was, but I grabbed him with one hand and realized he were completely limp. For several minutes the water surged back and forth, changing direction again and again, and all I could do was hold on, brace myself, and fight to stay positioned in the tube with someone's life in my hand. Those minutes felt endless because unlike training, there was no ▶

# 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.



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Boats & Marine Equipment



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Education & Training Workshops & Startups



Themed Activities

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Briefing for a helicopter dive



In the Trident HQ

guarantee the torment would end, and I had no idea what caused it or how long it would last.

Eventually I knew I had to make a decision, I needed to find an exit. I made an educated guess that the way out was behind me, and I began timing the shifts, releasing my holds when the current changed, pulling the diver with me, then pinning myself again before it reversed. I repeated that cycle, slowly moving inch by inch until I could finally see the walls through the white water, then a few more surges and suddenly I was out of the cave system, still underwater, still holding the diver. I swam hard away from the rock wall and surfaced in the foamy water, inflated both of our BCDs, and only then did I see his regulator still in his mouth. He looked at me, calm as could be, and asked, “Is that normal?” I told him, no, that is not normal, not at all. He had a laugh.

We linked back up with Alex and Jim, they had not been pulled into the caves, but they were slammed into the sea wall, washed onto the rocks, then sucked back out, and they were shaken but okay. Later we learned the cause was a small earthquake far offshore that created a very minor ‘tsunami’, maybe only a foot or two of extra water, but in that narrow channel, at that exact moment, it turned into something unbelievably violent.

That dive stuck with me because it happened as a civilian, on a seemingly normal day, at a familiar site, and it proved how fast the ocean can change. It is one of the reasons I train my staff the way I do. I do not rely on SEAL stories to justify Trident’s standards, I rely on real moments like that, moments where training and calm problem solving are the only things that keep someone alive.

### Q: What does the future hold for Steve Kaplan and Trident Adventures?

A: The future for me and for Trident Adventures is expansion, but not expansion for the sake of growth.

My goal is to continue building Trident in Hawaii into a powerhouse, and to push the adventure diving industry forward in ways that have not been done before. There are some major moves I plan to make that I want to keep as trade secrets for now, but the core vision is simple, I want Trident to become the standard for what adventure, training, safety, and professionalism should look like.

One of the biggest things I am focused on is building a company where working at Trident is not just a job, it is a real career. In an industry known for high turnover, I want our team to be able to grow with us, build a life around what they love, and eventually retire doing it. That means creating long term opportunity, advanced training, leadership development, and a culture where people feel like they are part of something meaningful.

A huge part of that future is continuing to take care of our veterans and active-duty community. We love serving military members, their families, and veterans, and I want to expand our VA-approved programs so qualified service members, dependents, and veterans can use their GI Bill and other education benefits to earn their scuba certifications, helicopter Cast Master, Freediver and various other certifications with us. For a lot of people, diving becomes more than a hobby, it becomes therapy, community, and a new mission, and I want Trident to be a place where that transformation is accessible and supported.

Geographically, I want to expand the Trident brand beyond Hawaii, first to Florida, then to California, and eventually to other parts of the world. The goal is not to copy and paste what we do here, it is to bring the Trident standard, the mindset, and the level of experience to new places and new oceans. Hawaii will always be our home, but I believe this brand can become global, and I believe we can change the industry along the way, loving people while loving what we do. ■

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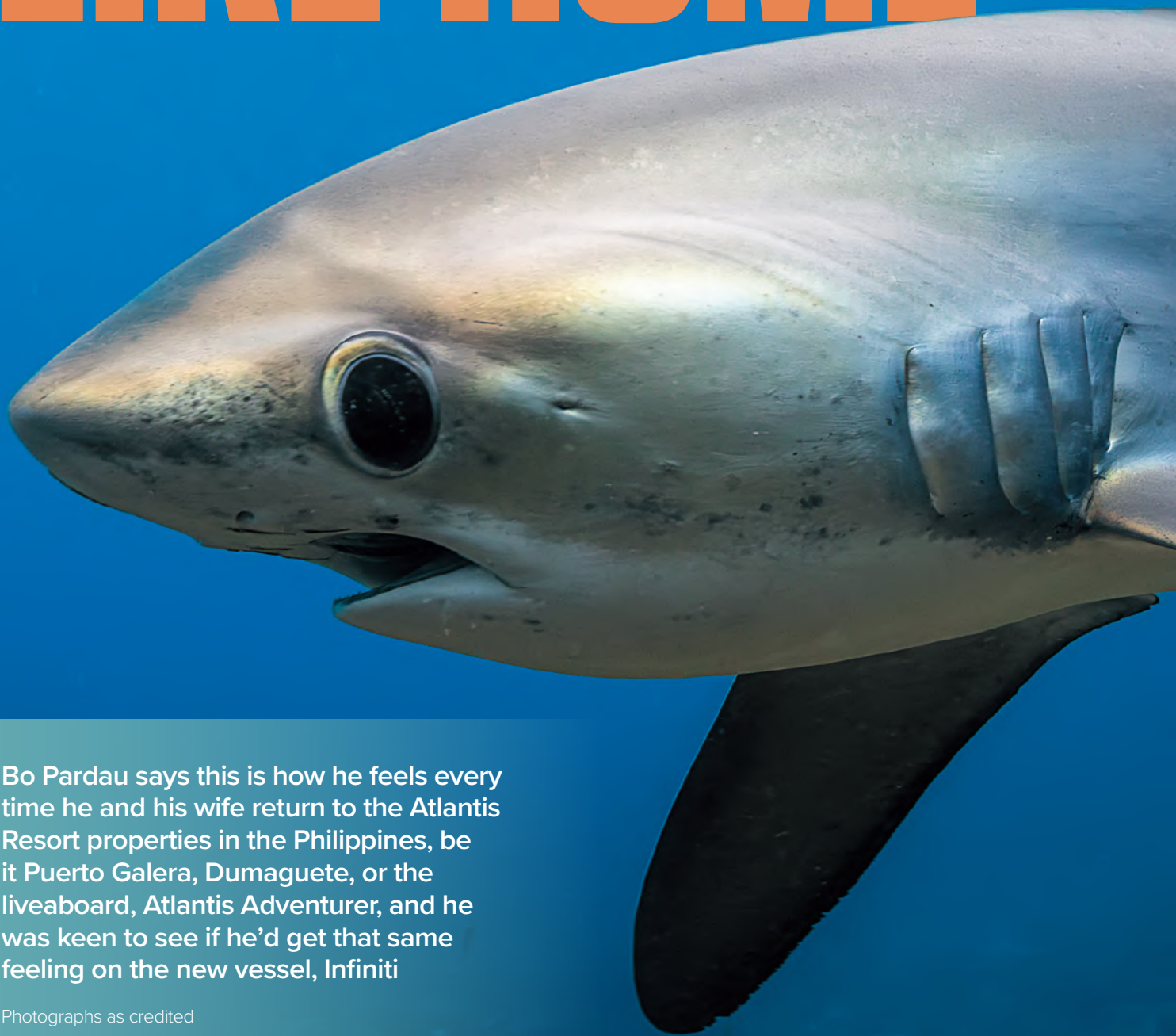
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# 'THERE'S NO LIKE HOME'



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 traveler 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 favorite feature was the roomy swim step, complete with three warm showers and

## *Did you know?*

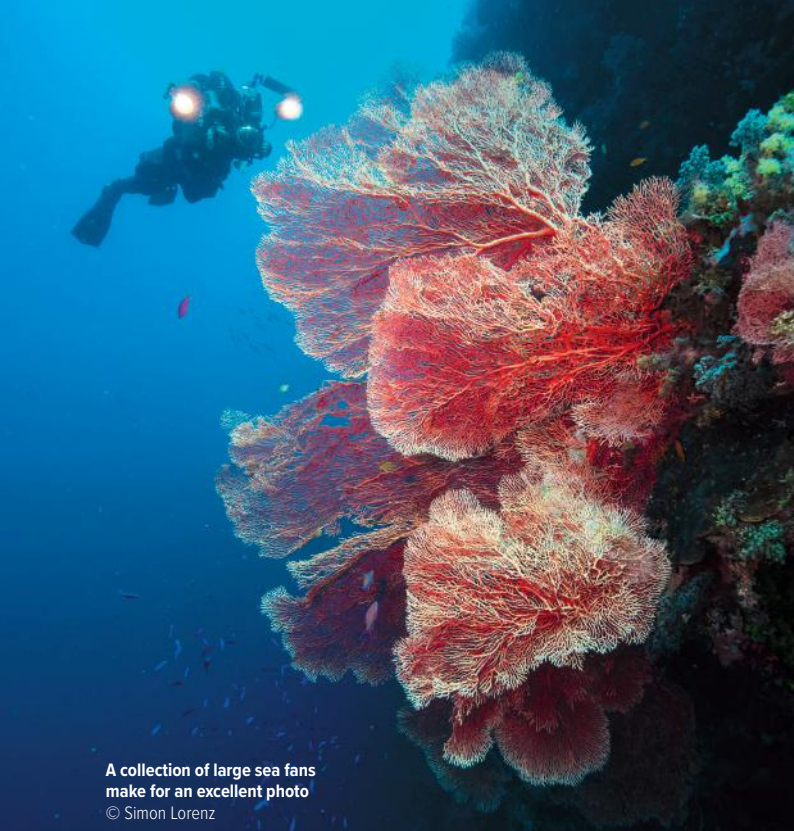
The Visayas North Route in the Philippines centres on the northern Visayan islands – mainly Panay, Romblon, Masbate, and Cebu, offering a mix of top-tier beach destinations, vibrant festivals and incredible diving opportunities.

## *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.

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 ▶



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



Colorful 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 colorful 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

● DUMAGUETE ● APO & CORON ● BOHOL ● TUBBATAHA ●  
● VISAYAS ● MALAPASCUA ● PUERTO GALERA ●



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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 600ft, hence the large sensitive eyes, but in the past would come to Monad Shoal at 100ft 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 50ft, 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 500ft. ▶



Diver and batfish  
in Gato Cavern  
© David F



Shireen Shipman  
pygmy seahorse



Schooling fish number  
into the hundreds  
© Patrick Ragot



Feeding corals  
© Simon Lorenz



Turtle and sea snake  
cruising the reef  
© David Fleetham

### 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 traveling to dive destinations to advance his photography. While wide angle ambient light photography is his focus, he also enjoys macro and blackwater photography. Having traveled extensively to dive destinations, Atlantis Resorts in the Philippines is still his favorite.



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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 16 foot 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 traveled 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 80-foot-tall lighthouse. The legend goes that the island was once a 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. ■



“ The thresher sharks spend the majority of their time at 600ft, hence the large sensitive eyes, but in the past would come to Monad Shoal at 100ft to be cleaned ”



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# RESPONDING TO DOWNCURRENTS

**D**owncurrents, also known as downdraft currents, differ greatly from known currents and can arise quickly and be very localized. In such situations, it is important to stay calm and respond thoughtfully. The best response to such a current will depend on environmental factors, such as depth, strength of the flow, the diver's distance from the edge of the current (the eddy line), topography, visibility, and risk of entanglement or entrapment. It will also depend on factors specific to the diver, including the bulkiness of their gear and their strength, buoyancy control, skill, and decompression status (or obligation).

If you find yourself caught in a downcurrent, your priority should be to maintain control — especially depth control. This will help prevent rapid depth changes and associated barotrauma injuries (squeezes) that could make the situation worse. Getting negatively buoyant, hugging the reef and climbing out rock by rock might work if the strength and volume of the flow requires it and the topography allows it. The advantage of this approach is control, and the diver is unlikely to experience serious shifts in buoyancy or of gas in sensitive spaces (primarily the middle ears and lungs).

Alternatively, swimming perpendicular to the flow could be effective. This approach may also offer a reasonable degree of control, with minimal need for fast changes in buoyant state or risk of barotrauma. Choosing to increase buoyancy probably represents the greatest risk of all. While it may be necessary in extreme situations, it is also possible that it could result in overcorrection and the subsequent hazards of an uncontrolled ascent (i.e., an elevated risk of barotrauma and decompression illness).

One way to increase your chances of a good outcome in an encounter with a downcurrent is to think about the possibility in advance and be prepared with various responses. The response to a mild downdraft could be to ignore it; a little more strength could prompt horizontal swimming to move out of the affected zone (with minimal or no addition of air to the BCD); even more strength or an uncomfortably large downdraft flow area would prompt grabbing the wall for stability and, possibly, climbing out. A minor amount of gas might be added to the BCD at the hanging-onto-the-wall point, but not as a primary part of the solution. Adding too much positive buoyancy could create a situation more dangerous than the initial hazard. It could pull the diver off the wall, precipitate a runaway ascent or make what could otherwise be a mild case of entanglement extremely problematic.



Mental practice is an important way to improve skills and responsiveness. A critical part of this preparation is to remember that every event has its own idiosyncrasies. Having multiple options, the physical skills and calm demeanor to employ them, and the willingness to adjust your strategy as needed will provide the best protection. ■



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# AUSTRAL

## best islands for diving

From coral cays on the Great Barrier Reef to volcanic outposts in the Tasman Sea and far-flung Indian Ocean atolls, Australia offers a remarkable mix of island diving experiences. Here's Deborah Dickson-Smith's pick of the best islands for diving

Photographs as credited

### Heron Island

(Southern Great Barrier Reef, Queensland)

**Vibe:** A classic coral cay sitting right on the reef rim, where the dive boat ride is short, the visibility is excellent, and turtles are a constant presence.

**What divers can expect:** The reef platform surrounding Heron Island is cut by sandy channels, bommies and coral gardens, creating long, relaxed dives with strong fish life and frequent turtle sightings.

#### Signature dive sites

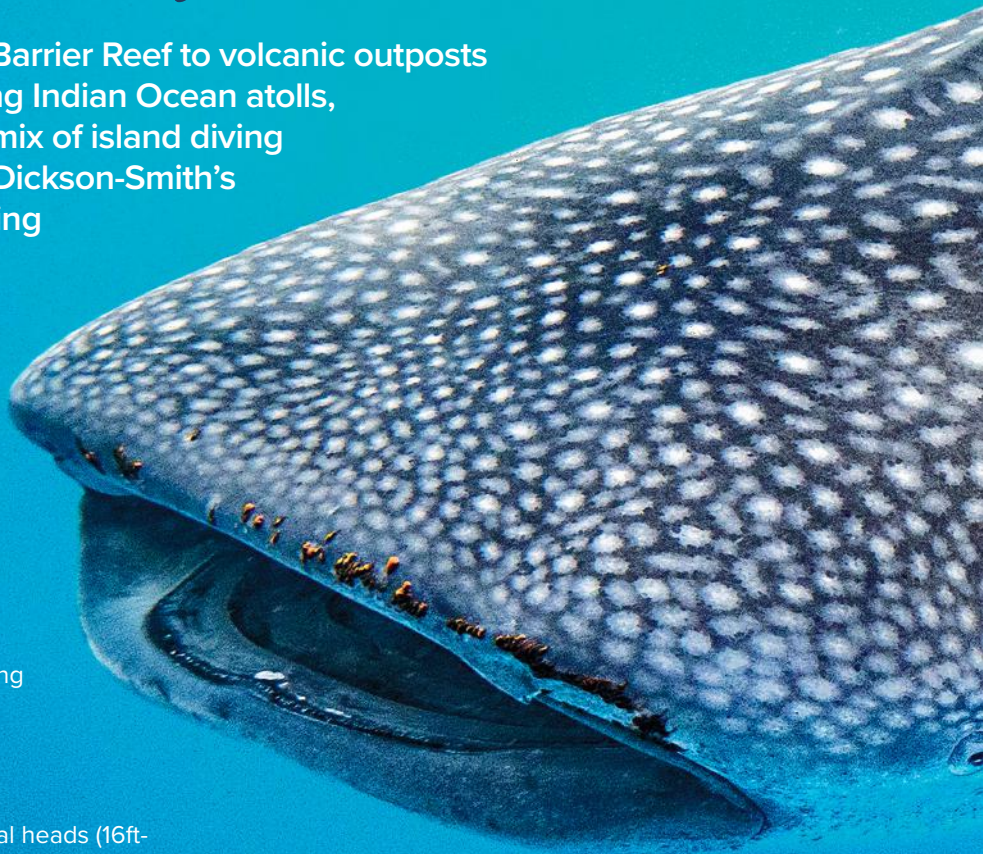
- **Heron Bommie:** Renowned for six large coral heads (16ft-60ft) acting as a cleaning station for manta rays, eagle rays, and turtles.
- **Pams Point:** Famed for vibrant, shallow coral, white-tipped reef sharks, and nudibranchs.
- **Coral Cascades:** A stunning wall dive (up to 90ft) covered in large sea fans and black coral trees, rich in pelagic life.

**Likely marine encounters:** Green and loggerhead turtles, especially during the nesting season, and you can also expect to see various species of rays and sharks, sweetlips,

barracuda, clouds of anthias and chromis on vast fields of staghorn coral, and epaulette sharks in the shallows.

**Best time to go:** Heron works year-round. Visit November to March for turtle nesting activity, and January to April for hatchlings.

**How to get there:** Fly/drive to Gladstone in Queensland, then transfer to Heron Island on the resort's catamaran or by helicopter. The closest international airport is Brisbane.



Heron Island

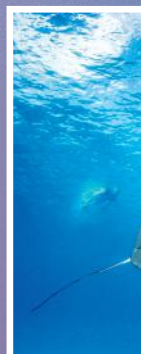


Whale breaching the surface

© Jeremy Somerville



Turtle and snorkeler cruising the reef



# IA'S

## Did you know?

The whale shark is the world's largest living fish, growing over 60 feet long and weighing over 20 tons. These gentle giants are filter feeders that consume plankton and small fish, swimming slowly in warm tropical oceans.

Close up encounter with a whaleshark at Christmas Island  
© Chris Bray



## Lady Elliot Island

(Southern Great Barrier Reef, Queensland)

**Vibe:** A coral cay famous for mantas, reef sharks, turtles and fantastic visibility, with dive sites just minutes from shore.

**What divers can expect:** Reliable big-animal encounters in an easy, resort-based setting. Dive sites are reached by short boat rides and range from coral gardens to cleaning stations and coral walls.

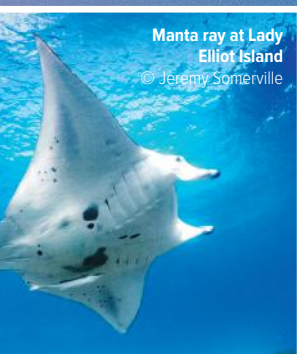
### Signature dive sites

- **Lighthouse Bommie:** Best spot for watching reef mantas at cleaning stations.
- **Spiders Ledge:** A wall dive (16ft-68ft) packed with moray eels, lionfish, trevally, and nudibranchs.
- **Coral Gardens:** A shallow (26ft), vibrant 'aquarium' with colorful corals and reef fish.
- **The Severance Wreck:** A popular wreck dive to explore for varied reef species.

**Likely marine encounters:** Lady Elliot supports an exceptional diversity of marine life. Manta encounters are especially good in the cooler months, from June to August, while turtle nesting occurs from November to April. Also expect eagle rays, trevally, barracuda and seasonal humpback whale sightings.

**Best time to go:** Lady Elliot is a true year-round destination, June to August is best for manta action. For turtle nesting and hatchlings, aim for November to April.

**How to get there:** Fly via small aircraft from Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, Brisbane or the Gold Coast. Closest international airport is Brisbane. ▶



Manta ray at Lady Elliot Island  
© Jeremy Somerville



Diving Great Keppel Island

## Great Keppel Island

(Capricorn Coast, Queensland)

**Vibe:** Relaxed island diving with fringing reefs, sandy bays and short boat rides, ideal for divers who want easy access without the logistics of a remote cay.

**What divers can expect:** The surrounding reefs offer gentle profiles, coral bommies, sand patches with good snorkelling as well as diving, making it a strong choice for mixed-experience groups.

### Signature dive sites

- **Egg Rock:** Three rocky pinnacles that plummet to 100ft, offering pelagic fish (trevally, barracuda), wobbegong sharks, sea snakes, and eagle rays.
- **Man and Wife Rocks:** This site offers varied depths (19ft-82ft) featuring vibrant soft and hard corals, nudibranchs, wobbegongs and sea snakes.
- **The Gulch:** A 100ft deep channel between Child and Barren Islands, popular for its dramatic walls, varied corals, and active marine life.

**Likely marine encounters:** Expect turtles, blue-spotted rays, octopus, cuttlefish, nudibranchs, anemonefish and schooling fusiliers and scad, with humpback whales passing offshore in season. Dugongs are often seen grazing on the extensive meadows of seagrass.

**Best time to go:** Great Keppel can be dived throughout the year, but conditions are generally best from April to November, when visibility is better and the weather is drier.

**How to get there:** Fly into Rockhampton, transfer by road to Rosslyn Bay near Yeppoon, then take the 30-minute ferry to the island. Closest international airport is Brisbane.

## Lord Howe Island

(Tasman Sea, New South Wales)

**Vibe:** A stunning subtropical island where volcanic scenery meets some of Australia's most-distinctive diving, from coral reefs and pinnacles to the legendary Ball's Pyramid.

**What divers can expect:** Lord Howe Island offers a very different island-diving experience from the Great Barrier Reef. Here, tropical species mix with temperate species, creating unusually diverse marine life and dramatic underwater topography.



The reefs at Lord Howe Island are full of fish  
© Scott Portelli

Sharks are a common sight  
© Scott Portelli



### Signature dive sites

- **Ball's Pyramid:** The world's tallest sea stack (16 miles offshore) is a must-do for advanced divers, offering chances to see the rare Ballina Angelfish, massive schools of kingfish, and Galapagos whalers.
- **Admiralty Islands:** A group of islands 15 minutes by boat from shore, featuring sites like Tenth of June (deep plateau, black coral) and Noddy Island.
- **Erscotts Hole & Comets Hole:** Inside the lagoon, so shallower diving (max 26ft) with excellent marine life like double-headed wrasse, anemonefish, and vibrant coral gardens.

**Likely marine encounters:** Lord Howe is known for huge schools of pelagic fish, marlin, turtles, rays and sharks. The island is particularly famous for its large population of Galapagos whaler sharks, and for rare endemic species including the Ballina angelfish.

**Best time to go:** The main dive season runs from September to May, when sea conditions are more favorable and water temps are at their most inviting.

**How to get there:** Lord Howe Island is reached via daily flights from Sydney.

## Christmas Island

(Indian Ocean Territory)

**Vibe:** Wild, remote and dramatically different, with sheer drop-offs, expansive sea caverns, gin-clear water and seasonal whale shark encounters.



Divers looking on at a sea snake  
© Ross Long

“ A stunning subtropical island where volcanic scenery meets some of Australia’s most-distinctive diving, from coral reefs and pinnacles to the legendary Ball’s Pyramid ”

**What divers can expect:** Christmas Island sits on the edge of the Java Trench, and that geography helps shape the diving. Reefs drop away quickly into deep blue water, creating a setting that feels more oceanic and dramatic than many of Australia’s mainland-accessed reefs.

#### Signature dive sites

- **Thundercliff Cave:** A signature site where you can surface inside a massive chamber to see stalactites after exploring the entrance with schools of cave sweepers.
- **Perpendicular Wall:** A sheer vertical wall plunging to 118ft, adorned with bright sea fans, sponges, and corals.
- **Flying Fish Cove:** Considered one of the world’s best shore dives, with easy access to remarkable coral reef systems and diverse fish species.

**Likely marine encounters:** Famous for whale sharks from November to April, schools of silky sharks, pods of spinner dolphins, eagle rays, mantas and large schools of fish.

**Best time to go:** For the best chance of encountering whale sharks, aim for November to March. Expect the best conditions from April to November.

**How to get there:** Twice weekly flights from Perth, WA which also connect through to Cocos Keeling Islands, making it possible to combine both islands in one trip.

## Cocos Keeling Islands

### (Indian Ocean Territory)

**Vibe:** A remote coral atoll with clear turquoise water, pristine reefs and uncrowded diving, ideal for travelers who value reef quality, visibility and a sense of isolation.

**What divers can expect:** Cocos Keeling offers a different kind of island diving again: a largely undeveloped atoll environment with lagoon sites, coral gardens, walls and even a few historic wrecks.

#### Signature dive sites

- **Cabbage Patch (19ft-88ft):** Famous for massive, golden-green cabbage-shaped corals teeming with anthias and other colorful reef fish.
- **Garden of Eden:** A vibrant site known for pelagics, including sharks, tuna and barracuda.
- **Manta Service Station:** A shallow spot known for manta encounters.



Giant colorful seafan off Christmas Island  
© Rosie Leaney

**Likely marine encounters:** The Cocos Keeling Islands are known for abundant fish life, reef sharks, bumphead parrot fish, large schools of snapper and fusiliers, and turtles.

**Best time to go:** Cocos Keeling can be dived year-round, but the calmer and drier months from April to November are generally considered the best window.

**How to get there:** Accessed by air from Perth, so often paired with Christmas Island on the same Indian Ocean itinerary. ■

### Diveplanit Travel

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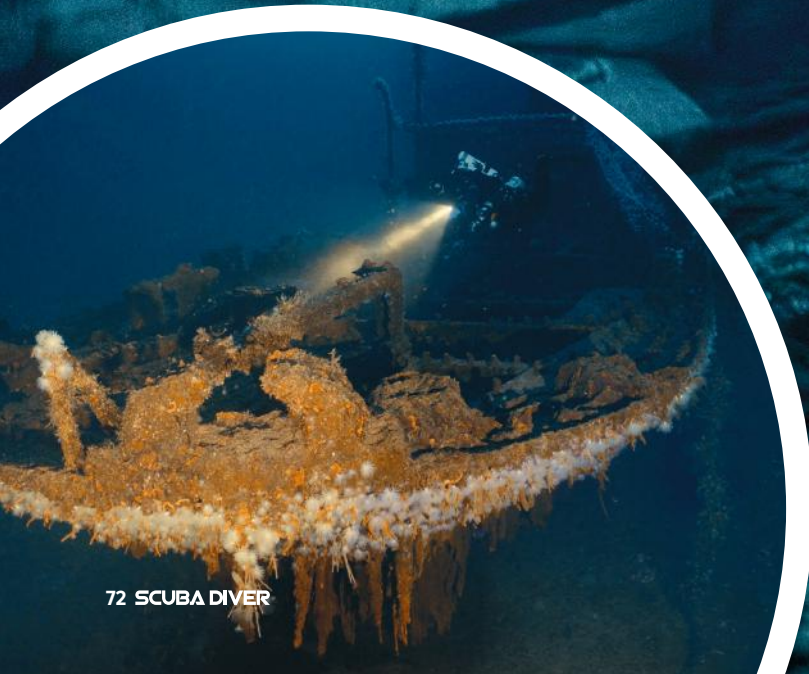
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# HIDDEN WORLDS

*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 traveling 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 230ft, 260ft or 295ft, 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.

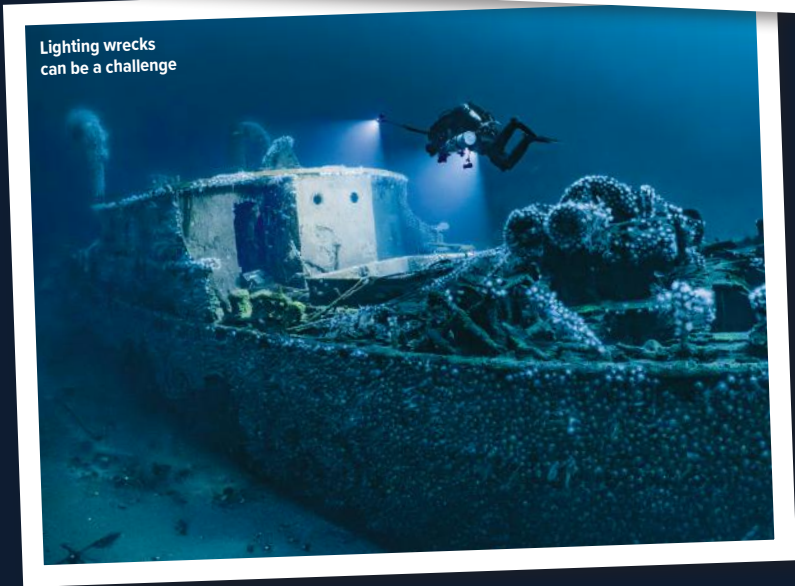
### 295ft – Viknor

One of those moments happened at the wreck of the Viknor in Malin Head. Depths close to 295ft, 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 140ft-165ft, 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 295ft, thinking deeper would mean better visibility and new ground. The reality was the opposite.

At around 195ft-230ft, 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. ▶

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Stern of a wreck festooned in marine growth

“ Keeping contact with the line, managing the camera, staying calm - all at around 195ft-230ft, with deco 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 195ft-230ft, 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.

Sherman tank



### 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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[www.youtube.com/ScubaDiverMagazine](http://www.youtube.com/ScubaDiverMagazine)

## ORCATORCH ORCA 7 | SRP: \$119

**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 aluminum torch, which looked resplendent in so-called Orca Orange (it is also available in Graphite Gray, Champagne Gold, Lava Red, and Space Silver). 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. 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 25 feet away, the beam's 'hotspot' was clear ▶



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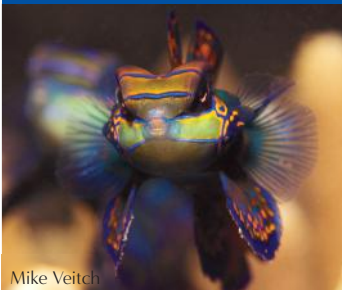
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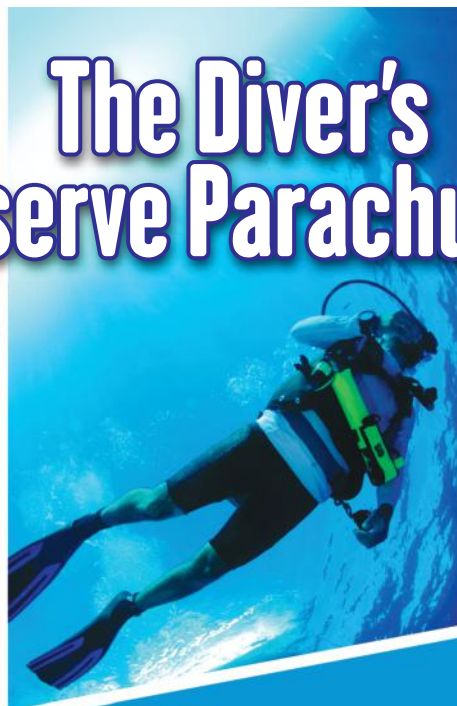


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# GEAR TEST EXTRA

Each issue, the Scuba Diver test team bring you the latest product and equipment releases from the dive industry. Cannot wait for the next edition? Keep up-to-date with all the latest gear news and reviews by heading over to the Scuba Diver YouTube channel!  
[www.youtube.com/ScubaDiverMagazine](http://www.youtube.com/ScubaDiverMagazine)

## ORCATORCH ORCA 7 | SRP: \$119

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)



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

  
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# HOW TO SNORKEL RESPONSIBLY WITHOUT DAMAGING CORAL REEFS



Roatan • Bay Islands  
Honduras

**L**earn how to snorkel responsibly without damaging coral reefs. This guide covers eco-friendly snorkeling practices, reef-safe gear, and essential tips for protecting fragile marine ecosystems.

Coral reefs are among the most-vibrant and fragile ecosystems on the planet. They support thousands of marine species, protect coastlines, and inspire millions of travellers every year. Unfortunately, reefs are also extremely sensitive - a single kick from a fin or a careless touch can cause long-lasting damage. For snorkelers, protecting coral reefs is simple if you know the right techniques. This guide explains how to enjoy the underwater world while keeping coral ecosystems safe and thriving.

## Understand why coral reefs are so fragile

Before you enter the water, it helps to know just how delicate corals are. Corals can be damaged by touch from hands or fins, sediment stirred up by kicking, sunscreen chemicals, standing or stepping on reefs, or breaking pieces off as souvenirs.

Corals grow slowly, sometimes only a few millimeters per year. What looks like a sturdy rock is actually a living organism that needs careful protection.

## Choose reef-safe sunscreen

Many common sunscreens contain chemicals like oxybenzone and octinoxate, which contribute to coral bleaching and reef damage. Choose mineral sunscreens with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, avoid aerosol sprays that fall onto the water surface, and cover up with a rash guard or UV shirt to reduce sunscreen use.

Reef-safe sunscreen is one of the easiest, most effective ways to protect marine environments.

## Perfect your snorkeling technique

Poor swimming habits are the main cause of accidental reef damage. A few technique adjustments make a huge difference. Responsible snorkelling skills include floating horizontally and staying streamlined; keeping your fins below the surface, not pointing down; kicking gently using your hips, not your knees; maintaining a safe distance from coral; and practicing in open sandy areas before moving over reefs.

## Never touch or stand on coral

Even a light touch can harm the protective layer corals need to survive. Rules to follow include not touching any coral,



rocks, or marine life; never standing on coral - even if it looks like a rock; avoiding grabbing coral for balance; and don't kick or rest on the reef. If you get tired, swim back to open water or float on your back.

## Respect marine life and keep your distance

Many snorkelers get excited when spotting turtles, rays, or colorful fish, but close encounters can stress wildlife and damage their habitat. Good marine life etiquette includes observing from a safe distance; not chasing, grabbing, or feeding wildlife; avoiding sudden movements; and never cornering animals or blocking their path. A respectful distance ensures animals remain safe and undisturbed.

## Choose eco-friendly snorkeling tours

If you join a tour, choose operators committed to conservation – at Anthony's Key Resort, the entire team are all about sustainability and being eco-friendly, and when you go on the dedicated snorkel boat, the highly trained team members can offer plenty of helpful hints and advice to ensure you get the most from your snorkeling experience while also protecting the marine environment.

## Conclusion - small actions make a big difference

Snorkeling is an incredible opportunity to witness life beneath the waves, but with that privilege comes responsibility. By using reef-safe sunscreen, practising proper snorkeling technique, avoiding contact with corals, and respecting marine life, you help protect these ecosystems for future generations. Responsible snorkeling ensures that coral reefs stay vibrant, healthy, and breathtaking - exactly as they should be. ■

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