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STUNNING DESTINATION

**MIGHTY MONTAGUE**  
VANESSA TORRES MACHO  
DETAILS WHY THIS ISLAND  
IS A TOP BUCKET LIST PICK

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

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AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

TEST EXTRA: ORCATORCH ORCA 7 DIVE LIGHT REVIEWED

## Inspirational INDONESIA

The **Arenui boutique liveaboard** is one of the **most-luxurious** diving vessels offering a spectacular array of **diverse itineraries** taking in **Indonesia's diving hotspots** and hidden gems



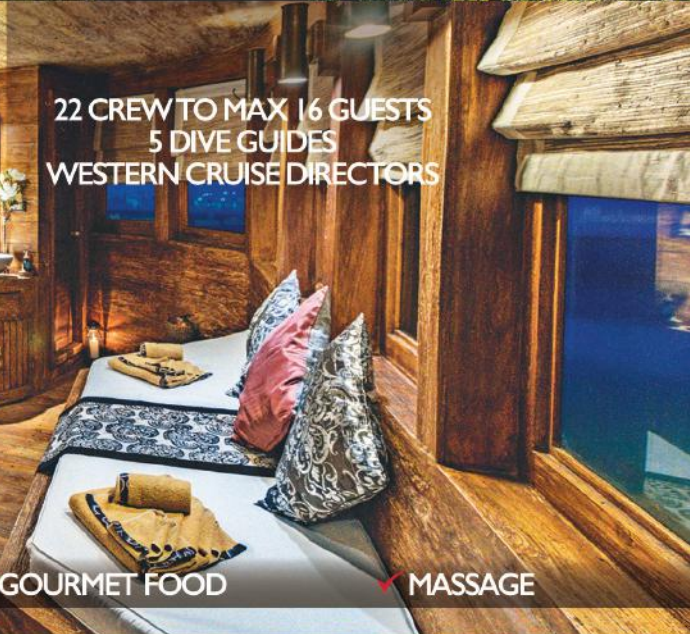
+ DIVING WITH ... MARCIA RIEDERER ▶ RIBBON REEFS, GBR



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### PUBLISHERS

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Times are changing and to keep the magazines free, we're asking dive stores to cover their own postage costs. If you enjoy reading the magazine, think about helping out your centre with a small donation to help cover their costs. Your continued support is most appreciated.



## Amazing headline speaker for GO Diving Show

With less than five months now to go until the GO Diving Show in Sydney, we already have a stellar line-up of amazing speakers across our four stages, and we are thrilled to announce that Chris Lemons has just confirmed he will be heading down under to speak on the main stage. You've probably seen the Hollywood blockbuster, starring Woody Harrelson and Shaun Lim - now hear the true-life story from the man himself.

In 2012, Chris Lemons was working as a saturation diver in the North Sea when his lifeline was severed. Left stranded on the seabed with his backup supply nearly exhausted, he survived for over 30 minutes in conditions that should have been unsurvivable. His story became a Netflix documentary and then a feature film, both called Last Breath. Even if you have seen these, hearing Chris tell the story in person is something else entirely.

At the UK GO Diving Show, he held the room from the first word, and questions kept coming long after his time was up. Joining Chris on the main stage are the irrepressible Pete Mesley and the talented underwater photographer and film-maker Alex Kydd. With more top names to come, this promises to be the best show yet.

Speaking of talented photographers, Vanessa Torres Macho shares her experiences at Montague Island, a place she believes offers one of Australia's best encounters with marine life. Nigel Marsh returns to the Ribbon Reefs, which are among his favourite regions of the Great Barrier Reef, and is not disappointed by these pristine reefs teeming with marine life. Further afield, we report back from one of the newest dive centres to open in the Solomon Islands and discover the diving delights on offer from the capital, Honiara. We also take an in-depth look at the variety of itineraries on offer in the stunning waters of Indonesia, on board the luxurious Arenui liveaboard.

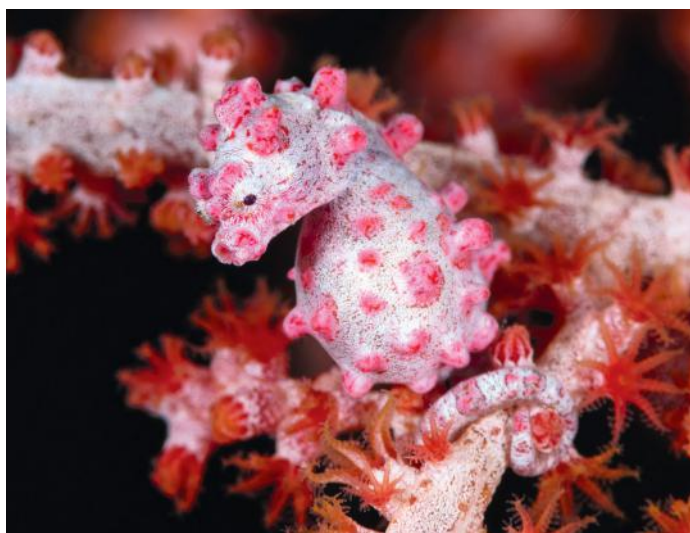
Our Diving With column focuses on award-winning photographer Marcia Riederer, in the Conservation Corner, William Gladstone explains how divers can help rescue distressed marine creatures. Our tech offering for this issue explores the challenges of filming in the deep, with the Hidden Worlds feature.

**Adrian Stacey, Editor (Australia & New Zealand)**



*"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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The *Arenui boutique liveaboard* is one of the most-luxurious diving vessels offering a spectacular array of diverse itineraries taking in Indonesia's diving hotspots and hidden gems



+ DIVING WITH... MARCIA RIEDERER • RIBBON REEFS, GBR

PHOTOGRAPH © ADRIAN STACEY



## Regular columns

### 8 News roundup

Aggressor Adventures' Wayne Brown passes away, the DEEP Vanguard is deployed off Florida, and a freediver sets a new world record - for underwater weightlifting.

### 32 Divers Alert Network

The DAN team of experts offer some hints and advice on how to deal with cuts and scrapes.

### 34 DAN Q&A

The Divers Alert Network medical team discuss the issues with peeing in a wetsuit.

### 46 Conservation Corner

William Gladstone discusses ways in which divers can assist marine life that has become ensnared in fishing equipment.

## Monthly features...

### 16 Australia

To call Montague Island one of Australia's best marine life experiences would be an understatement. If it's not already on your radar, it should be, as Vanessa Torres Macho explains.

### 22 Indonesia, part one

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

### 40 Diving With... Marcia Riederer

PT Hirschfield chats with the UW photographer whose passion for nature echoes her biology and conservation background.



*...continued*

**50 TECH: Hidden Worlds**

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.

**56 The Solomon Islands**

Direct flights from Brisbane put the Solomon Islands, once regarded as a remote, off-the-beaten-track destination, within reach in a matter of hours – we explain why Australian divers should seriously consider this island nation for a future adventure.

**62 Australia**

The Great Barrier Reef is over 2,300km long and dotted with some amazing dive destinations. However, there is one part

of the reef that is very special to Nigel Marsh and that he keeps returning to year after year - the outstanding Ribbon Reefs.

*Gear & testing*

**68 What's New**

New products coming to market, including the Scubapro MK17 Evo 2 / G260 regulator, Waydoo Subnado Plus, Miflex Deep Black hoses, Nikon Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II, and a new range from Backscatter.

**70 Test Extra**

Editorial Director Mark Evans rates and reviews the innovative OrcaTorch Orca 7 compact dive light.





# INDUSTRY NEWS

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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## THREE MISSING, CAPTAIN HELD AFTER SEYCHELLES LIVEBOARD SINKING



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

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

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

### Investigation underway

Law-enforcement authorities have launched an investigation into the circumstances of the sinking. The 61-year-old French captain appeared before the Seychelles Supreme Court on 16 March and was ordered to be remanded for 14 days while those investigations continued. The captain is being held under laws governing commercial conveyance by water in an unsafe or overloaded vessel, and "rash and negligent" actions, but has not been charged. The Galatea was a 30-metre steel gulet-style sailing and motor yacht that typically operated one-week or shorter diving safaris out of the Seychelles' largest island Mahe for up to 14 guests. It had a dive-tender, a smaller dinghy and two 12-person life-rafts.

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

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

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

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

Vanguard (middle right and bottom) 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 (top right), the company’s flagship habitat programme designed to support larger crews on longer missions.

### Why Tennessee Reef

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

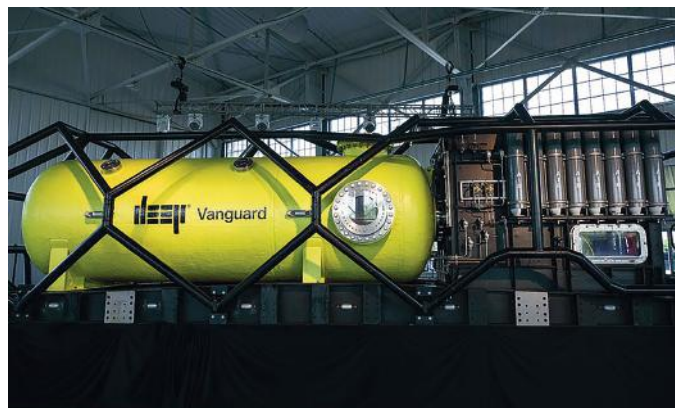
### Main operating base

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

### Safety and certification

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

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



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

### About DEEP

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

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

First he held his breath for 29 minutes after breathing pure oxygen last year – now Croatian freediver Vitomir Maričić is claiming another ‘don’t-try-this-kids’ Guinness World Record (GWR) with a feat that took far less time to accomplish – a 300kg underwater squat-lift. The stunt was carried out at the bottom of a covered outdoor swimming pool in Croatia. Maričić was able to increase his lift from an initial 220kg through 260kg to the eventual 300kg-weighted barbell, describing it as “an achievement far tougher than it looks”.



### Physical challenges

In air, a lifter feels the full mass of a weight but under water buoyant force makes this seem less. In a pool a 300kg steel barbell would have an apparent weight reduction of up to 40kg and feel up to 15% lighter. Buoyancy reduction depends only on displaced volume so does not increase with depth once the weights are submerged, whether the lift is performed at 2m or 5m. However, because movement through water is slowed by drag, the lifter has to generate force against the water as well as lifting the object, while the slower movements call for better control and stability.

### World records

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

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

## IDIVE.SITE LAUNCHES PLATFORM TO HELP DISCOVER AND BOOK DIVE EXPERIENCES

iDive.site has launched a new online platform to help divers easily search, compare and instantly book dive experiences and courses across scuba, snorkelling, freediving, technical and professional disciplines.

Initially launching in Australia, the platform allows divers to discover upcoming dive trips, courses and underwater experiences from local dive and tour operators, with plans to expand internationally.

Divers can search, filter, save favourites, and compare to find available dives and courses — all without visiting multiple websites. By showing real-time availability, iDive.site helps divers discover opportunities they might otherwise miss. Members also enjoy special discounts and offers, making diving more accessible and rewarding. A key focus of iDive.site is supporting the pathway from first-time divers through to advanced certifications and specialty training. By improving visibility for courses and operators, the platform aims to help more people take their first steps into diving while encouraging certified divers to continue progressing their skills.

For dive and tour operators, iDive.site provides simple tools to manage listings and bookings, with API capabilities that can sync availability and bookings from existing systems. Divers and operators can explore the platform at <https://iDive.site>



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# THE DIVE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



## THE AUSTRALIAN DIVE INDUSTRY: THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Written for the DIAA by Bob Diaz, Central Coast Divers

**A**ustralia's dive industry is entering a defining period - one shaped by growth, innovation and an increasing responsibility to protect the environments that make diving here so extraordinary. From the Great Barrier Reef to the temperate waters of New South Wales and Western Australia, the sector is evolving quickly.

Changing travel trends, environmental pressures and shifting diver expectations are all playing a role in what comes next. At its heart, diving remains a powerful tourism driver. Globally, dive travel continues to grow, fuelled by demand for immersive, experience-led holidays. Australia is well positioned within this space, with projections suggesting the local dive tourism sector could more than double by 2030, growing at around 11% annually. But growth alone isn't the story.

### Experience is Everything

Today's divers want more than just ticking off a destination - they're seeking meaningful, memorable experiences. Whether it's swimming alongside manta rays, exploring historic wrecks or advancing into technical diving, the emphasis is on adventure and personal achievement.

Australia's strength lies in its diversity. Few countries offer such a wide range of dive environments, from tropical coral reefs to kelp forests and purpose-built artificial reefs. This variety allows operators to cater to increasingly specialised niches, from eco-tourism to advanced and technical diving.

### Sustainability Takes Centre Stage

If one trend will define the next five years, it's sustainability. Divers are more environmentally aware than ever, and will pay a premium to access well-managed, protected sites.

This shift brings both opportunity and responsibility. Marine conservation is central to the industry's future. With ongoing climate change related challenges such as coral bleaching and algal blooms, operators are encouraged to adopt low-impact practices, support reef protection and work alongside conservation initiatives.

### Tech-Driven Diving

Technology is also reshaping the dive experience. Advances in dive computers, real-time communication and AI-assisted planning are improving safety and expanding what's possible underwater.



At the same time, digital storytelling - through underwater photography, video and social media - is attracting a new generation of divers inspired as much by visuals as by the experience itself.

### A More Professional Industry

Rising costs and tighter regulations are likely to drive consolidation across the sector. While this may reduce the number of smaller operators, it also presents an opportunity: a more professional, safety-focused industry delivering higher-quality experiences.

### The Rise of the Local Diver

Alongside international tourism, domestic diving is gaining momentum. Clubs, training programmes and community networks are helping turn first-time divers into lifelong participants - something that will be critical for long-term sustainability.

### Looking Ahead


The Australian dive industry stands at a crossroads. Growth is assured, but success will depend on balance - between expansion and protection, innovation and responsibility.

Those who adapt will thrive. And in doing so, they won't just shape the future of diving in Australia - they'll help define its legacy. ■

If you're interested in joining the Dive Industry Association of Australia (DIAA) please contact us:

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To call Montague Island one of Australia's best marine life experiences would be an understatement. If it's not already on your radar, it should be, as Vanessa Torres Macho explains

Photographs by Vanessa Torres Macho

Located in southern New South Wales, Montague Island is accessed through the beautiful town of Narooma. A paradise if you're into outdoor activities such as whale watching during the months of May to November, fishing, surfing, kayaking, golfing and tasting local oysters. The estimated resident population is around 3,000 people, so if you're after a break from the busy city, this is your place.

I first visited Narooma in 2015 while working at Dive Centre Bondi, leading one of my first trips. Nothing could have prepared me for the extraordinary close encounters that followed. Barunguba Montague Island lies about 5.5 miles offshore in the Tasman Sea and is only accessible by boat. A protected nature reserve near the edge of the continental shelf, it's home to a historic lighthouse built in 1881 and thriving seal colonies that have rebounded since near extinction in the 19th century, due to the demand for fur and oil.

The island hosts both Australian and New Zealand fur seals. Despite the name, they're more closely related to sea lions than true seals. Fur seals have external ears and can 'walk' on their extremities, unlike true seals, which wriggle on their bellies and have no visible ears.

“ Having dived here both on scuba and breath-hold, I've found the best interactions - and photos - often happen near the surface ”

Aside from the seals, you can enjoy other local fauna like giant bull rays, Port Jackson and wobbegong sharks, blue grouper, giant cuttlefish, schools of mados, pomfrets and yellow pike, octopus, grey nurse sharks and the occasional turtle. On the way to the island it's quite common to spot dolphins and whales on the surface. Having dived here both on scuba and breath-hold, I've found the best interactions - and photos - often happen near the surface. That said, deeper dives can deliver unforgettable one-on-one encounters, so trying both is worthwhile.

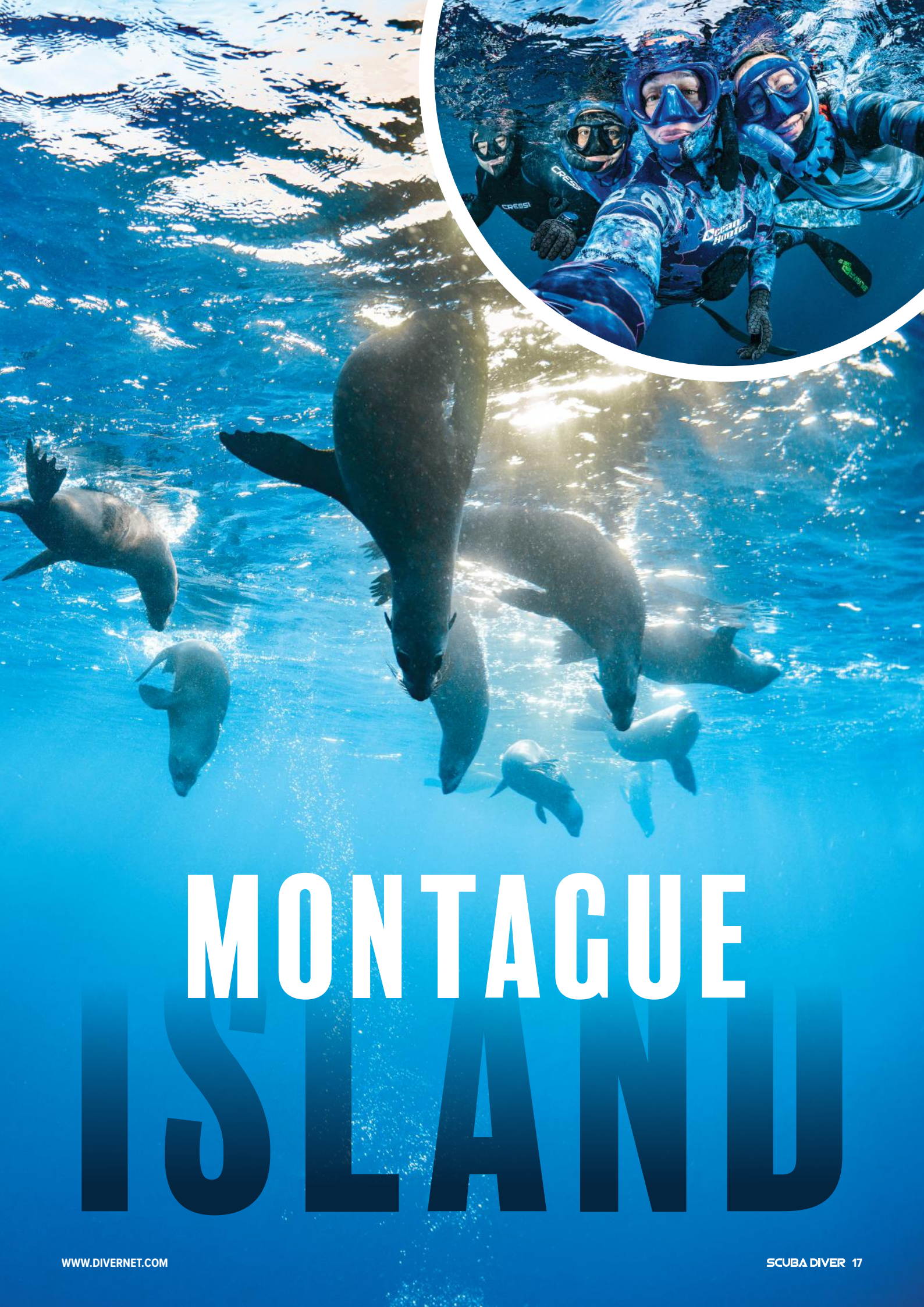
I'm often asked what the best underwater photography setup is for diving with seals. My advice is simple: use what you have and build on it where you can. Underwater photography can be expensive, but considering how much we already invest in training, trips, and dive gear, it makes sense to put some of that into a capable camera setup. Whether you're an amateur or a professional, there are a

few essentials that will make a real difference. Seals are fast and unpredictable, so a tray or grip helps with stability and framing. A wide focal range - around 16–35mm (full-frame equivalent) or a fisheye - is ideal for getting close while still capturing the environment. For compact systems, wide-angle wet lenses are a great option, and action cameras now offer wide-angle lenses that are compact and produce professional quality results. I love shooting with my fisheye for close up portraits or when the seals get so close they can almost touch the dome. In fact, for those carrying a dome, be warned, I have had to polish teeth marks from my dome!

At Montague Island, ambient light can be excellent, but if you can invest in a strobe, it's well worth it. It brings out the seals' warm tones and fine fur detail beautifully - even a single strobe makes a big difference. Video lights, on the other hand, often lack the power needed for photography and can introduce backscatter, especially at distance. ▶

### Did you know?

Montague Island, located off the coast of Narooma, is home to a thriving colony of up to 1,000 – 2,000 Australian and New Zealand fur seals. Visitors can snorkel or dive with these playful, curious animals year-round, with peak numbers in winter and spring.



# MONTAGUE

# ISLAND

### Shooting with ambient light

One of my preferred techniques is using natural light when shooting wide angle. I will either position the sun behind me to light up the scene or in front of me to create silhouettes - positioning the subject against a brighter background, often with the sun filtering through the water. This works particularly well on clear, sunny days when sun rays penetrate the surface.

My priority is to avoid overexposing highlights, especially the sun and surface, so I tend to shoot at higher f/stops. It's far easier to recover shadow detail in post-production than to correct blown highlights. Another effective ambient light technique is capturing the shimmering reflections of surface ripples on the subject. This requires strong, direct sunlight and positioning your subject just below the surface. Clear water conditions will yield the best results.

A key advantage of shooting with ambient light alone is the absence of backscatter, resulting in cleaner images. The other fantastic advantage is that you can choose a really fast shutter speed to get a crisp in focus image. Seals are fast and need a solid focus.

### Shooting with strobes

Strobes are ideal when you want to capture fine detail or illuminate subjects against the sun. I typically use two high-powered strobes, although excellent results can be achieved with just one. In fact, investing in a single powerful strobe is often a better long-term choice than starting with two lower-powered units, as you can always add a second later.

As a general rule, I use strobes when my subject is within a few metres. Beyond that range, they are less effective and can introduce unwanted backscatter in the water column. In recent years, I've favoured a 'bunny ears' position, angled slightly back and set to mid-to-high power. This setup helps minimise backscatter while also preventing dark areas in front of the dome. When photographing fast-moving subjects, it's important to stay within your camera's sync speed - particularly when using an internal trigger - to avoid partially lit frames.

### Vanessa Torres Macho

Vanessa is a Sydney-based underwater photographer who leads local and international expeditions, as well as underwater photography courses. Through Aquatic Imaging Australia, her retail store in Bondi, she supports photographers at all levels, helping beginners start their journey and assisting experienced shooters in refining and enhancing their equipment and skills.

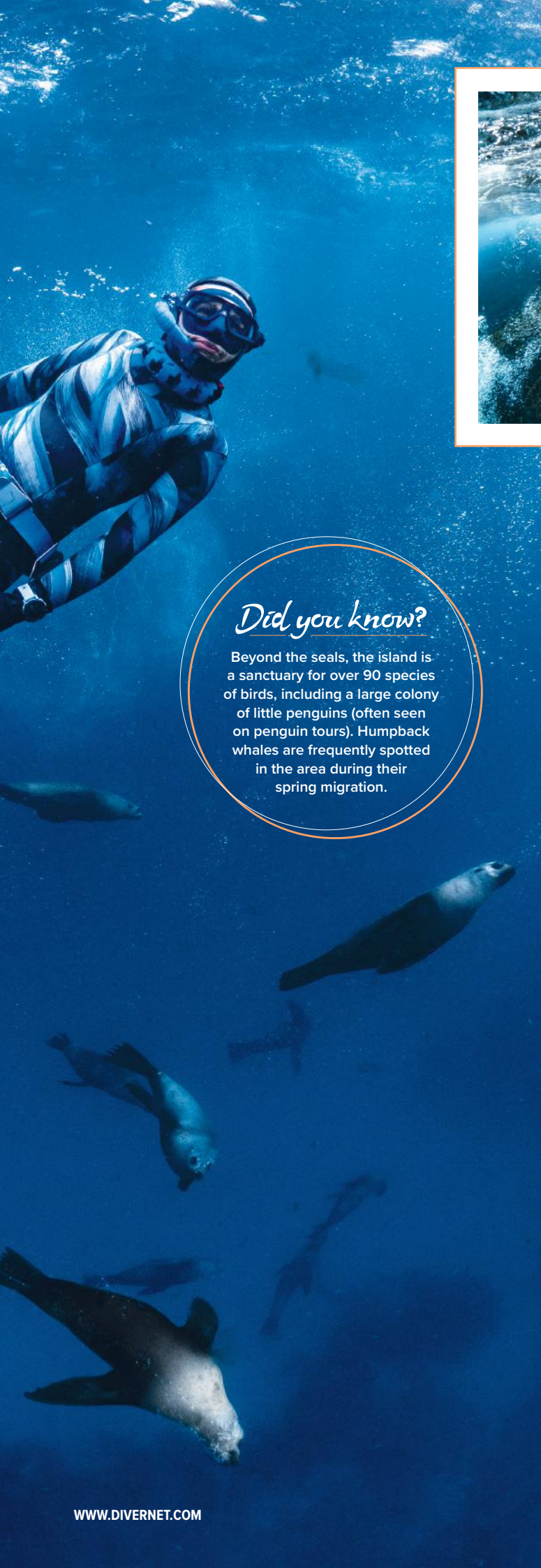
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Overcast conditions can be challenging



“ It's one of the most-effective ways to elevate a composition. Clear communication before entering the water is essential, as a well-briefed model can significantly improve results ”



Shooting with strobes with the sun behind

*Did you know?*  
Beyond the seals, the island is a sanctuary for over 90 species of birds, including a large colony of little penguins (often seen on penguin tours). Humpback whales are frequently spotted in the area during their spring migration.



Using ambient light to create seal silhouettes

**Shooting with overcast conditions and low visibility**

We can't really control the weather, so sometimes we get stuck with overcast days, or greener water with more particles. The good news is that we can still shoot wide angle! This is the time to make your images look dark and moody and get real close.

My approach is to stay closer to the surface or subject and use strobes to create darker, more atmospheric images. I still angle the camera slightly upward to capture surface texture, this means that some of those unwanted particles can get lost in that texture and it also adds another dimension. I generally stay within an f/stop of 10-13 to deepen the background and reduce visible particles even more. Strobes are usually set to mid-to-high power in these scenarios.

**Adding models**

Including a diver or model can add scale, context, and narrative to an image. It's one of the most-effective ways to elevate a composition. Clear communication before entering the water is essential, as a well-briefed model can significantly improve results.

Sometimes the model simply provides scale; other times, the interaction between diver and animal creates a compelling, memorable moment. Capturing that connection with a wild animal can be truly powerful. ▶



Ambient light  
with no strobes

“ I love shooting with my fisheye for close up portraits or when the seals get so close they can almost touch the dome. In fact, for those carrying a dome, be warned, I have had to polish teeth marks from my dome! ”

### Focus

It's essential to understand your camera's focus modes and focus area settings, and how they mostly perform on both crop and full-frame sensors. Seals move quickly, so accurate autofocus is critical to avoid motion blur - unless you're intentionally using a slow shutter for creative effect. This is as important as choosing your f/stop, shutter speed or ISO.

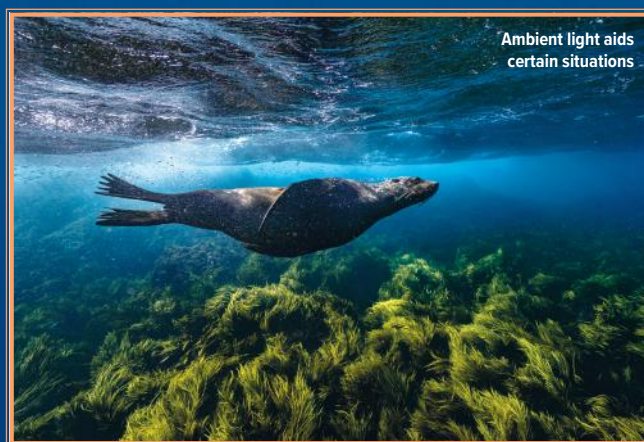
### Buoyancy and rig control

Finally, ensure your setup is neutrally buoyant or slightly negative. For larger rigs with buoyant domes, adding trim weights can help maintain better balance and control. Ideally, your camera should sit level or slightly nose-up in the water.

An improperly balanced rig can be more than just inconvenient - it can be a safety risk. I've seen divers lose heavy setups or struggle during ascent while freediving with unbalanced equipment. Avoid compensating for a buoyant rig by adding excessive weight to yourself; in an emergency it could be really hard to ascend. On the other hand if you have a very heavy rig and reduce your personal weight/led but lose your rig this can lead to an uncontrolled ascent.

Finally, don't underestimate the importance of good clamps. When tracking fast-moving subjects like seals, secure arms are essential to maintain strobe or light positioning. There's nothing more frustrating than descending on a breath-hold only to have your lighting shift out of place. Unless you have exceptional breath-hold capacity, you won't have time to correct it at depth.

Last but not least, my mantra for improvement, which is 'shoot, review, edit, apply feedback, and repeat'. Don't forget to enjoy the process! ■



Ambient light aids  
certain situations



Models swimming  
with the seals



Models with  
ambient light

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# All aboard the ARENUI

Indonesia is the largest archipelago on Earth and renowned as a world-class diving destination due to its location in the fabled Coral Triangle (also known as the 'Amazon of the Seas'), which means it offers incredible marine biodiversity - 3,000 species of fish and 600 species of coral - and a huge variety of dive sites, from stunning coral gardens and dramatic walls to gentle drifts and mind-blowing muck dives.

Accessing the very best dive sites is often easiest from a liveaboard, and you don't get much more opulent than the Arenui. This traditional Phinisi (a classic Indonesian wooden sailing vessel) is truly a work of art in itself and has to be experienced first-hand to really appreciate it – photographs do not do it justice.

## The Arenui

To live up to the motto of being 'The Boutique Liveaboard', attention has been given to every aspect of the Arenui to ensure that it fully embodies the team's philosophy of providing a unique dive holiday experience. They aim to provide the best there is in terms of diving and leisure activities, without sacrificing any of the comforts and luxury you would expect to get from a five-star hotel on land.

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

Photographs by Arenui Boutique Liveaboard



### *Did you know?*

Take a look at the intricate carvings on the stairs from the restaurant down to the lower cabins. These locally carved wood panels depict the Ramayana story. Ramayana is an important part of Hindu faith. It is an epic poem of courage, magic and humour, containing 18 books and 24,000 verses divided into 500 songs.

The 43-metre-long, 450-ton vessel began life in July 2007 and the main hull was crafted from ironwood by over 50 local craftsmen in South Sulawesi, with the structure of the boat then being completed in Java and Bali by more than 430 carpenters, carvers, and finishing artisans.

No less than 14 different types of wood were used in the crafting of the Arenui, including recycled teak wood from Javanese houses (some 70 percent of the wood used to build the Arenui is recycled wood obtained at a premium cost from old Javanese buildings), and 17 different types of finishing techniques were used to give it its distinctive appearance.

All wood finishing was done by hand, using traditional materials and techniques, and the bronze, brass and copper features, such as the unique hinges and handles, were all handmade. Most of the lamps were made from copper or brass and were handcrafted in Java, while the portholes were made from bronze.

Guests get to luxuriate in exceptionally spacious cabins, tastefully furnished with exquisite handicrafts from each of the Indonesian provinces. When it is time to eat, they can relax in the decadent indoor restaurant, or enjoy the sensational views from the fabulous skydeck.

The Arenui team believes that, even when sailing around remote islands, there's no reason to forego fine dining. ▶

## PART ONE

After all, a delicious meal prepared with care and style is the best way to remain full of energy for the next dive, and rather than the typical dive liveaboard buffets, guests will be able to choose from daily a-la-carte menus.

The whole operation is led by four highly experienced western cruise directors, and with 24 crew – including four local dive guides - serving a maximum of 16 guests, you can be sure any cruise is a truly relaxing and first-class experience.

### Diving with the Arenui

When it comes to the dive itineraries, you are spoilt for choice - the Arenui has chosen the best dive sites and the best times of year to explore these world-famous destinations. Whether it's nudibranchs and rhinopias you're after, or manta rays and schooling fish, the diverse range of cruises on offer have it all, and rather than just stick to the tried-and-tested world-renowned areas, the Arenui also explores more off-the-beaten-track locations for those with a sense of adventure.

To showcase the best of Indonesia, the vessel spends the May to October months mainly around the Komodo National Park area, taking in dive sites and landscapes from Bali right across to Flores and Alor. In November, it moves towards Ambon in Maluku and the Spice Islands in the Banda Sea, working its way to the Raja Ampat area of Western Papua to continue dive cruises from December through until April. In addition, Arenui has recently added truly unique and rarely visited destinations such as Indonesian Borneo, Selayar, Taka Bonerate National Park, Triton Bay, Halmahera, and several regions of Sulawesi (the remote Central West Coast, Tomini Bay, and North Sulawesi).

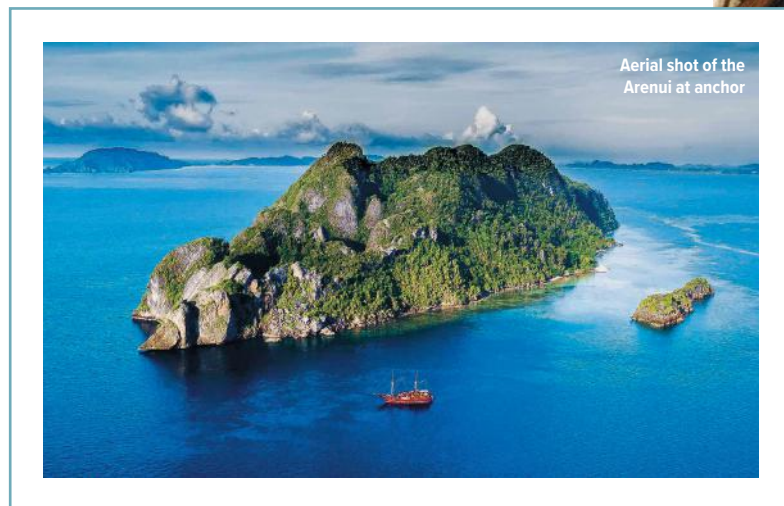
These areas are just as fascinating as the more-renowned ones, yet still off the radar - perfect for travellers who want to experience genuine remoteness and explore the new rising stars of Eastern Indonesia.



The dining room is like something in a five-star restaurant



The intricate carvings on the descent down to some of the cabins



Aerial shot of the Arenui at anchor



You can expect world-class cuisine

“ One of the more unique thrills of this site is being able to hear ‘fish thunder’ – the loud booming sound made when a large number of fish move rapidly through open water ”

## Komodo and Sumbawa

This region features an extremely rich biodiversity born of a land of contrasts, from warm waters and tropical species, to cooler currents with temperate ocean life. Offering such a diverse range of dive sites and special features, it's no surprise the Komodo National Park was awarded 'New 7th Wonder of Nature' status in 2011.

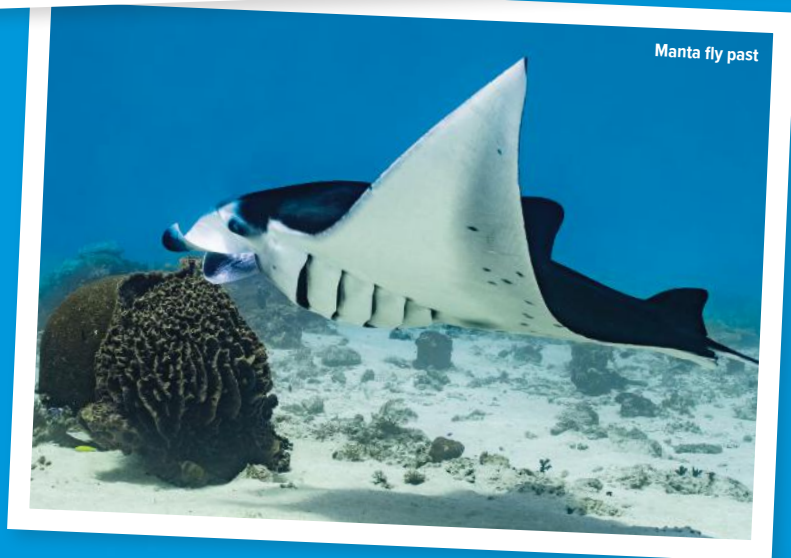
For divers, Komodo is a great chance to enjoy all your favourite types of diving styles. Pack your logbook with everything from exhilarating drift dives, treasure-hunting muck dives, deep-water sea mounts and coral gardens to fantastic wall dives, pinnacles and open ocean dives. Meet creatures great and small, from manta rays and mola mola to pygmy seahorses and nudibranchs. All this while sailing through a stunning island landscape. This famous dive destination is located 200 nautical miles east of Bali in Nusa Tenggara province – in the Lesser Sunda Islands – and has a total land area of 75,000 hectares which encompasses a number of islands, the largest of which is Komodo itself (34,000 hectares). A total of 112,500 hectares of the surrounding waters is also under the jurisdiction of the park rangers, allowing for the protection of over 1,000 species of fish and hundreds of different corals.

Komodo's dive sites stretch from the warm waters of the Flores Sea in the north to the chillier waters down south in the Indian Ocean. The underwater terrain presents many contrasts, with sheer cliff walls, pinnacles, sandy flat bottoms, underwater plateaus, slopes, caves, swim-throughs and channels – all with differing colours, sizes and types of both hard and soft corals.

As an example of how Komodo truly represents diving diversity, two popular dive sites at Gili Lawa Laut – Crystal Rock and Castle Rock – offer opportunities for critter spotting, as well as big fish action.



Sumptuously decorated cabins and suites await



Manta fly past

In fact, Castle Rock offers a nice opportunity to try out a 'reef-hook' dive, as you secure yourself to the rock and float in the current, watching the schooling fish and predator/prey action. Dive at other famous sites such as Cannibal Rock, Manta Alley, Yellow Wall, Angel Reef, Torpedo Alley, Pink Beach, Unusual Suspects, Crinoid Canyon and Gazer Beach. Visit the very best that the Komodo area has to offer, from Pulau Moyo, Pulau Banta and Bima Bay, to Pulau Satonda and Pulau Sangean.

In Moyo, you'll find spectacular corals and crystal-clear waters. Banta is famed for its stunning wall dives and drop-offs, with beautiful corals covering the walls like an Andy Warhol painting. Bima Bay offers world-class muck diving with black coral covered reefs. Satonda is famous above the water for its fruit bats (which take off every sunset for a night's feeding) and below the waves for its sheltered bays and remarkable critters. Try something unique at Sangeang Island as you dive in the shadow of an active volcano, feeling the hot springs bubbling up under the black sand. ▶

Pristine soft corals and sponge growth

Saleh Bay offers an extraordinary opportunity to dive with whale sharks in complete privacy. At Arenui, they reserve the site exclusively for their guests, ensuring an intimate, crowd-free encounter with these gentle giants - one of the most-magical experiences in Indonesia. Although there is diving year-round in Komodo, the best period is considered to be April through November. Currents in parts of Komodo can be quite strong – so dives are carried out according to the tides – but with so many great sites to choose from, the team can always adapt the schedule for the best diving. The Arenui team believes that recreational diving should come with no stress and no unnecessary risks. For this reason, even sites that are typically characterized by strong currents are approached in a way that guarantees the highest standards of safety and comfort. At Arenui, they believe that every dive should feel relaxed and enjoyable - even when currents are present. Arenui itineraries taking in Komodo include Komodo Focus, which as the name suggests centres around Komodo itself; Komodo-Sumbawa, which covers from Komodo across to Bima or Bali, heading past Lombok on the way; and Alor-Komodo, which takes in the dive sites from Komodo across the Sea of Flores to Alor.

### Raja Ampat

Arenui itineraries taking in the Raja Ampat area include one centring on Raja Ampat; one – Raja Ampat to Triton Bay, which heads southeast; Raja Ampat to Halmahera, which goes west to this up-and-coming area; and Maluku to Banda to Raja Ampat, a wide-ranging trip hitting three distinctive locations.

In addition to varied corals, critters and pelagics, this destination offers vibrant and colourful underwater scenes plus majestic landscapes, making it a perfect destination for keen photographers. The only problem with diving here, in Raja Ampat, is that you'll be so spoiled by the near-perfect conditions that you may never want to leave or dive anywhere else again.



The fabled rhinopias



Hairy frogfish

Spread across 1,500 virtually untouched islands, the waters of the Raja Ampat region are home to the most-colourful, pristine and photogenic soft coral reefs, as well as a wide range of creatures from walking sharks to manta rays to pygmy seahorses. Raja Ampat can boast over 1,300 reef fish (25 endemic species), 13 marine mammals, five species of endangered sea turtles, 600 hard corals and 75 percent of all known coral species.

When you join a cruise featuring Raja Ampat, all the famous dive sites such as Dampier Strait, Manta Sandy, Boo and the Misool area are on the agenda. Most cruises start and/or end at the provincial capital – Sorong – in West Papua (previously known as Irian Jaya). Sorong, which sits on the western coast of Papua island, is almost equidistantly located between Indonesia's famous 'island of the gods' – Bali – and the capital of neighbouring Papua New Guinea – Port Moresby (roughly 1,060 nautical miles east of Bali, versus 1,080 west of Port Moresby). Raja Ampat, translated directly as 'four kings', was named for the four main islands in the area – Batanta, Misool, Salawati and Waigeo. The Arenui cruises by these four main islands, as well as many smaller ones, as it takes you to explore dive sites truly fit for a king.

West of Sorong, Batanta Island will give you the chance to experience the amazing diversity of diving in Indonesia. Along the south coast are two incredible muck dives, where divers enjoy close encounters with all sorts of intriguing critters. At Black Beauty and Happy Ending, look for tiger shrimps, ghost pipefish, mimic octopus and many nudibranchs. During the night bobbit worms, white V octopus and frogfish can be found hiding in the black sand. ▶



Giant sea fan on a dramatic wall



Palau, Micronesia



Bohol, Philippines



Raja Ampat, Indonesia



Santo, Vanuatu

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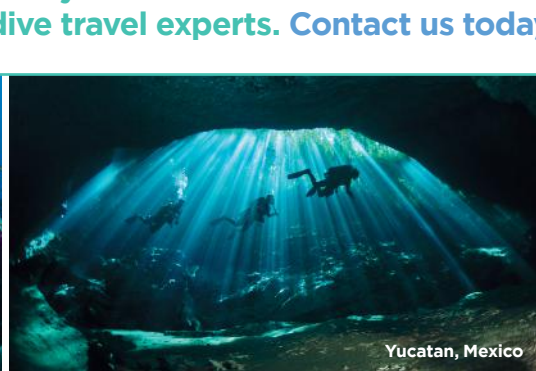
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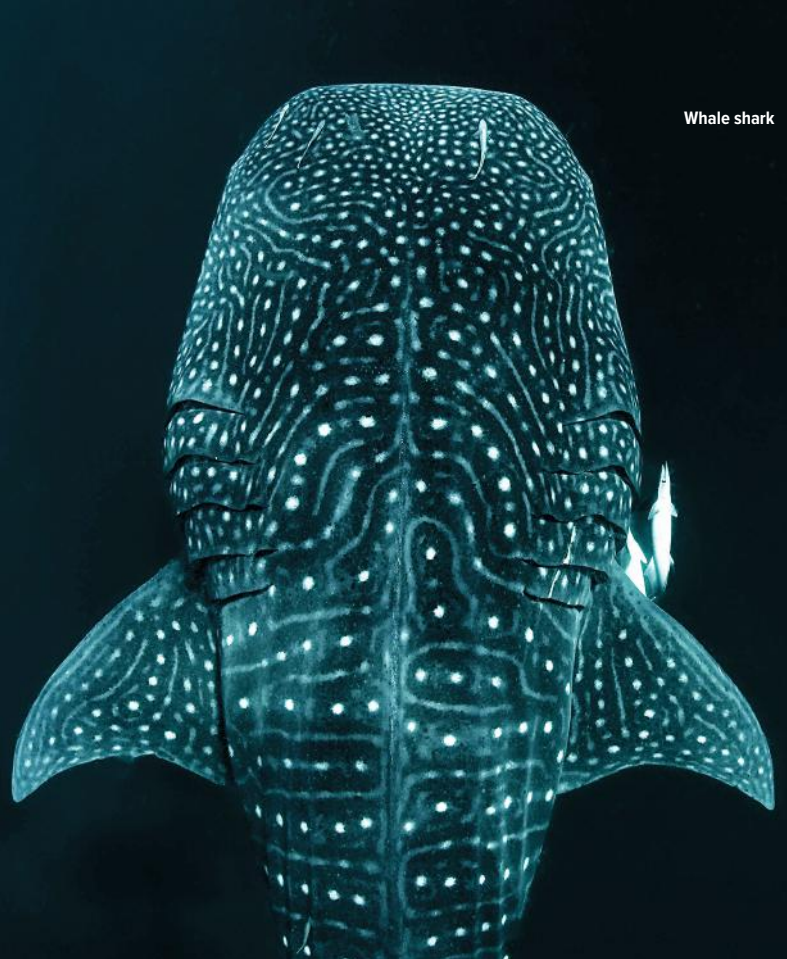
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Whale shark



Anemonefish  
hiding in its host



Hypselodoris  
apolegma  
nudibranch

“ Pack your logbook with everything from exhilarating drift dives, treasure-hunting muck dives, deep-water sea mounts and coral gardens to fantastic wall dives, pinnacles and open ocean dives ”

In the south of Raja Ampat, the Arenui dives various sites around the large island of Misool. Dive at Nudi Rock, Whale Rock, Batu Kecil, Fiabecet Corner and Kalig Ridge. Wobbegong sharks hide under colourful coral shelves and the elusive epaulette ‘walking’ shark comes out at night. Marvel at the overhangs and bommies of Wedding Cake. At Wayili Rock, witness large schools of batfish, trevallies and barracuda. Explore Boo Rock and Boo Point, for large Napoleon wrasse and green turtles.

South-east Misool is famous for the profusion of colourful soft corals and sea fans beautifully draped all over the reefs. If you’re not one already, then diving in Misool will undoubtedly make you a huge fan of sea fans. Jump in at Neptune Fan Sea for a great drift dive, rushing along a gulley past giant and exquisitely coloured gorgonian seafans.

Back in central Raja Ampat, just north of Batanta (in the Gam area, south of Waigeo island), expect huge schools of fusiliers, snapper, surgeons, batfish and barracuda. Wobbegong, blacktip and whitetip sharks cruise the reefs here and look out for the elusive blue-ring octopus creeping around the hard corals.

Heading to the northern Raja Ampat area, the Arenui visits a pearl farm in Aljui Bay (north-west side of Weigeo), to explore underneath the main jetty for wobbegong sharks, stonefish, hundreds of schooling scads, ghost pipefish, juvenile batfish and more. Nearby, the night dive is probably the best of the whole cruise, with a chance to see velvetfish, ghost pipefish, waspfish, coconut octopus, helmet flying

gurnards and even the walking shark. West of Waigeo, the rocks and seamounts in the Kawe area are truly singular as they actually sit on the equator. Kawe is one of the few places in the world where you can travel between the northern and southern hemispheres while diving! Yet, this is not the only reason to be excited about this dive. A combination of currents and feeding stations in this area combine to draw in a profuse amount of fish life, as well as huge mantas.

Returning to central Raja Ampat, the Arenui heads to the Dampier Strait (which flows between Waigeo and Batanta), where nutrient-rich ocean currents create an incredible underwater environment. Everything which makes for a wonderful dive can be found here. Explore the dives sites of Cape Kri, Blue Magic, Chicken Reef, Otdima Reef, Kerupiar Island and Mioskon. Ironically, sardines are about the only reef fish not found at the site of Sardine Reef, but you won’t even notice as fusiliers, surgeonfish, trevallies, rainbow runners, sweetlips and bannerfish practically block out the sky, as they swarm over a reef decorated with sea fans, soft corals and huge orange elephant ear sponges encrusted with pastel colonies of tunicates. One of the more unique thrills of this site is being able to hear ‘fish thunder’ – the loud booming sound made when a large number of fish move rapidly through open water. ■

NB: Next issue we take a look at some of the more off-the-beaten track itineraries on offer aboard the Arenui in Indonesia.

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Pioneering the way for diving and conservation in Raja Ampat, committed to nature and the local people since 1993.



# THE TRAVEL EXPERT

Each month dive travel expert Deborah Dickson-Smith of Diveplanit Travel offers hints, tips and advice to help you plan your next trip!

## DIVING FRENCH POLYNESIA: SHARKS, PASSES AND A NEW DIRECT ROUTE TO PARADISE

**G**etting to French Polynesia from Australia has long required patience — stopovers adding time to what should be a straightforward South Pacific escape. But that's about to change. From 14 December 2026, Air Tahiti Nui will launch direct flights between Sydney and Papeete, making this iconic destination far more accessible.

For divers, that's big news. Because while French Polynesia is known for overwater bungalows and turquoise lagoons, beneath the surface lies something far more exhilarating — one of the world's great big-animal dive destinations.

### Why Dive in French Polynesia?

Diving here is all about energy, current and marine life. The action centres on lagoon passes — narrow channels where tidal flows concentrate fish and predators in spectacular numbers. Expect strong currents, world-class drift diving, large populations of sharks, huge schools of fish and visibility often exceeding 30 metres.

Seasonal events like whale migration and spawning add even more intensity. This is dynamic, adrenaline-fuelled diving — not a gentle reef experience.

### Tuamotu Islands — The Heart of the Action

The Tuamotu Islands are the epicentre of diving in French Polynesia, home to some of the most-famous passes in the world. Fakarava offers pristine reefs, dense fish schools and abundant sharks, ideal for intermediate to advanced divers. Its South Pass hosts the famous grouper spawning (June–July), where thousands of fish gather, attracting large numbers of hunting sharks.

Rangiroa's Tiputa Pass delivers thrilling drift dives with dolphins, sharks and manta rays, while Tikehau offers a more-relaxed experience with manta rays and exceptional fish density.

### Marquesas Islands — Remote and Untamed

For a more-adventurous experience, the Marquesas Islands, particularly Nuku Hiva, offer raw, less-dived conditions.

Volcanic underwater landscapes and nutrient-rich waters attract sharks, rays and pelagic species. This is frontier diving — remote, unpredictable and best suited to experienced divers.



### Society Islands — Easy Access, Big Encounters

The Society Islands — including Moorea, Tahiti and Tahiti Iti — provide the most-accessible diving. Moorea is known for reliable shark and ray encounters, while Tahiti offers a mix of reef and pass dives with sharks, turtles and schooling fish. These islands are ideal for easing into the region before tackling the Tuamotus.

### Seasonal Highlights

Humpback whales (July–October) migrate here to breed and calve. While encounters are mostly snorkelling-based, divers may hear whale song underwater or spot whales between dives.

Grouper spawning (June–July) in Fakarava is a major highlight, drawing huge numbers of fish — and sharks — into one place.

### Best Time to Dive

Diving is year-round, but:

**May–October:** best conditions and visibility

**June–July:** grouper spawning

**July–October:** whale season

### The Takeaway

With direct flights from Sydney launching in December, French Polynesia is about to become far more accessible. If your ideal dive involves current, big fish and unforgettable moments in the blue, French Polynesia should be high on your list. ■

If you're ready to explore French Polynesia's underwater wonders, the Diveplanit team is here to help you plan the perfect trip:  
[Diveplanit.com/french-polynesia](https://diveplanit.com/french-polynesia)

# DIVE THE ANDAMAN SEA

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Contact the team at Diveplanit Travel for expert advice on diving in Thailand - we'll find the best liveaboard option for you - and the best deal! email: [enquire@diveplanit.com](mailto:enquire@diveplanit.com) phone: 1800 607 913 [diveplanit.com](http://diveplanit.com)

# CORAL SCRAPES AND CUTS

**C**uts and scrapes are the most-common injuries incurred by divers and snorkellers. DAN receives about one inquiry a week related to someone who has come into contact with coral. A burning sensation, pain and itching are common and may also be accompanied by a rash. These injuries can have a latent evolution and take weeks or months to heal, confusing both patients and clinicians.

## Mechanisms of injury

Soft living tissues cover the surface of corals. In the case of stony corals, the rigid (abrasive) structure underneath makes the coral's soft tissue easy to tear and get into the scrape or cut. Foreign material can prolong the wound-healing process since the different antigens and substances cause an acute inflammatory process and infection. Cuts and scrapes from sharp-edged coral and barnacles tend to fester and may take weeks or even months to heal. Granulomas can form if debris from the original wound remains in the tissue. The body attempts to remove it, resulting in an itchy rash or papule (small, raised, tender bump) that lasts for some time before the body eliminates it.

Whether it is a coral, a rock or a wreck, they all share a common factor: They are covered by living marine organisms, which makes coral cuts and scrapes unique.

## Manifestations

The extent of the reaction depends on the presence and amount of toxins, the size and location of the abrasion and the pre-existing sensitivity of the injured person. The most-common manifestations are a burning sensation, pain and itching. A rash may accompany the injury if the coral is a hydroid, such as fire coral.

## Prevention

When underwater, try to avoid contact with coral or any other living creature. Whenever possible, wear a wetsuit or dive skin to protect yourself if you are accidentally pushed into coral by another diver or a current. Ocean divers should consider a marine animal first aid kit for their travels. Ready supplies will speed up the time to properly administer first aid for injuries. Additionally, for divers who want to learn more about the various marine life injuries, there are courses in marine life identification, first aid courses and a variety of books and publications available.

## First Aid

Scrub the cut vigorously with soap and water, then flush the wound with large amounts of water. Flush the wound with a half-strength solution of hydrogen peroxide in water. Rinse



again with water. Apply a thin layer of antiseptic ointment, and cover the wound with a dry, sterile and non-adherent dressing. If you have no ointment or dressing, you can leave the wound open. Clean and re-dress the wound twice a day.

If the wound develops a crust, use wet-to-dry dressing changes until they become non-adherent. Then resume the regular wound dressing described above.

Look for any signs of infection: extreme redness, red streaks on the extremity, pain, fever, pus or swollen lymph glands. If you have any, consult a health professional about starting an antibiotic.

Watch for coral poisoning, which can occur if abrasions or cuts are extensive or from a particularly toxic species. Symptoms include a wound that heals poorly or continues to drain pus, swelling around the cut, swollen lymph glands, fever, chills and fatigue. If you have these symptoms, see a physician. As a rule, treat wounds properly and let them heal before diving. This is particularly important before travelling to a remote location or one with limited local medical care capabilities.

Learn more about Coral Scrapes and Cuts and other conditions at [World.DAN.org/Health-Medicine](http://World.DAN.org/Health-Medicine)

## DAN Online

For an extensive range of diving health and safety information and downloadable resources, research studies, incident summaries, and free e-Learning courses, take the time to explore DAN World's new website: [world.DAN.org](http://world.DAN.org)



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## From the DAN Medical Line

DAN medical information specialists and researchers answer your dive medicine questions

### Is it harmful to pee in a wetsuit?

Divers have an adage: 'There are two types of people — those who pee in their wetsuit and those who lie and say they don't'. Urinating in a wetsuit is common for many recreational divers and is generally not harmful when exposure is limited. Immersion in water, especially cold water, triggers immersion diuresis, which shifts blood into the central circulation and increases urine production. Most divers feel that urge within minutes of entering the water.

Some divers choose to relieve themselves during the dive rather than hold it, especially on longer dives or in cold water. That practice can be reasonable if the diver cleans the wetsuit afterward, but it also comes with a few considerations for both the diver and the suit.

Holding urine through a full dive can be uncomfortable and can increase the risk of bladder irritation or urinary tract infection. A full bladder can also be distracting underwater when awareness and control matter most. From a comfort and safety standpoint, it is understandable that a diver would choose to empty their bladder rather than tolerate significant pressure and distraction.

Urine that remains in contact with the skin for extended periods, however, can cause skin irritation. It contains compounds that can disrupt the natural protective layer of the skin and affect the pH, possibly leading to redness, itching, or a rash if the contact continues after the dive.

The same compounds can also gradually affect neoprene if the suit is not rinsed well, and repeated exposure can shorten the wetsuit's life. Divers who urinate in their wetsuit should promptly remove it after the dive, rinse their skin with fresh water to help reduce the likelihood of irritation, and thoroughly clean the suit.

A potential issue is the fit of your suit. Very tight wetsuits have limited space for urine to move away from the body. In some cases, a diver may start to urinate and then stop before the bladder empties completely even though the urethra remains open, which could theoretically cause urine backflow into the bladder due to pressure, increasing the risk of a urinary tract infection. A diver who notices difficulty fully emptying the bladder in a tight suit may benefit from a different fit. Stinging organisms that may be present inside the suit from previous dives or that enter through gaps caused by improper fit may cause other issues. Urine can activate small hydroids, larvae, or jellyfish fragments and cause irritation or welts against bare skin. While this is an uncommon problem, regularly rinsing your wetsuit between dives and making sure it fits correctly helps reduce your risk.



Good wetsuit hygiene prevents odour and irritation and protects the material. Recommended practices include rinsing the inside and outside of the suit with fresh water after every dive, using wetsuit-safe cleaners when needed, and fully drying the suit before storage. Rental operations should have clear cleaning protocols to prevent cross contamination.

Got a medical question? send an email to [medic@dan.org](mailto:medic@dan.org). Our team is standing by to assist you. [World.DAN.org](http://World.DAN.org)



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# Mustard's MASTERCLASS

Alex Mustard discusses why underwater photographers should sometimes leave their scuba kit behind and break out the humble snorkel

Photographs by Alex Mustard

**A** couple of issues ago we looked at a lesson that photographers could learn from tech divers. This month we're after inspiration from the other end of the underwater exploration spectrum, the humble snorkel. As scuba-diving photographers, it is easy to slip into the misconception that scuba is always the superior choice for photography. And if we have a full day of diving planned, then that is surely the route to the best images.

This month I hope to dispel that way of thinking. It is the start of April, and I've already logged my 100th dive of the year, but there have also been times I've skipped dives to snorkel. To convince you I'm going to talk through some of my 2026 images where I've taken the tube, instead.

There are many well-known snorkel trips for photography, such as chasing baitballs, or hoping for encounters with cetaceans, manatees, whale sharks, seals and rays. The aim of this column to remind you to reach for the snorkel, when it is not the headline activity of the trip. A snorkel can get you into environments and photographic opportunities that you simply wouldn't be able to dive. The shallows can often be packed with life, have the best light and give the opportunity to work surface texture, reflections and split-level images into our portfolio. Of course, all dives start and finish at the surface, but that simple J-shaped plastic tube keeps our attention there.

Gear-wise, snorkel photography is usually biased to wide angle. You can shoot macro and fish portraits when snorkelling, but the compromises of either having to hold your breath or being constantly wobbled by the surface, are limitations.

I've taken plenty of macro shots while snorkelling, but at best they are often indistinguishable from scuba shots. If you are looking for new images, then wide angle brings few drawbacks and visually makes more use of the opportunities of the shallows. I usually favour a fisheye, but any wide angle will do. Most of the time, there isn't much need for flash, but that depends on the situation.

My first trip of the year took me to Grand Cayman, a destination famous for clear waters, spectacular vertical reef walls and shallow reef sites cut with caverns and canyons. Lesser known to outsiders is a small bay on the south coast called Spotts, where in chest deep water there is a lush seagrass meadow, home to friendly green turtles, stingrays, octopus and huge school of silvery scads. You can snorkel there all day, but I particularly like the mornings and evenings, when the low angle of the sun adds beautiful light rays to the picture.

This is one of those situations where there is a benefit in using flash. Normally, the shiny flanks of the scads act as perfect camouflage in shallows, so a tickle of flash helps to pop them from the background, especially when shooting against the attractive sunbeams. The turtles don't really need strobes in these depths, but since I have them on the camera, I use them on low power for fill. Patience is the most-powerful ally. Green turtles don't mind you being close or photographing them, but they don't like you approaching them! The trick is to get into range without looking like you are trying. Never swim directly towards a turtle, instead swim parallel, slowly closing the gap, without looking at them too much. Once you are up close, they will stay totally relaxed and let you shoot for as long as you want.

My other trip took me to the amazing Indonesian archipelago of Raja Ampat. Raja has more underwater delights that any other place I know, and the diversity of adventures makes it a must for the snorkel. The world's most-famous jellyfish lake is in Palau, where an enclosed lake of seawater is home to stingless golden jellies. Raja Ampat is made of similar porous limestone islands and has a number of smaller jellyfish lakes. None are on the scale of Palau, but they remain interesting for photography. I don't recommend taking strobes because most jellyfish lakes are murky, the jellies stay right at the surface and they involve a hike to reach, so the lighter the camera the better! There are a few different images to chase here. First is a dense jellyfish bloom, simply find the area with the ▶



While strobes aren't needed in the shallows, they help reveal silvery fish



Raja Ampat's mangroves are ideal for split level images



A heavy tropical downpour adds texture to the classic jellyfish lightbulb shot

most jellies and try and get a frame filler. Time your shots so that you end up with a key jelly as a focal point to give structure to the pattern. The second image is the split level. Jellyfish lakes are usually surrounded by trees and the juxtaposition of jellies and forest create compelling pictures. You can also include the trees through a slice of Snell's window in a fully underwater shot.

The final option is a classic - the jellyfish lightbulb shot. This is an upward composition, framing the jelly in the circle of Snell's window, with the sun behind it. Obscuring the sun with the jelly acts to both make the jelly glow like a bulb, but also makes the rest of the exposure easier to balance. We often take this shot blind, by positioning the camera beneath the jelly. With a fisheye it is easy to get your own head in the photo, so hold the camera out at arm's length. This time, our trip to the jellyfish lake coincided with a

tropical downpour. Rather than lament the lack of sun, I embraced it and tried to capture the raindrops in all my images.

Raja Ampat is especially celebrated for its mangrove environments, with thriving corals growing right up to the roots of the trees. This habitat offers excellent conditions for split level photography, but the very shallow water (less than 60cm) makes shooting these images tricky.

The hardest aspect is lifting the camera up, half out of the water, without touching down on the delicate corals. On my last trip, Don Silcock, a regular contributor to Scuba Diver, suggested we bungee some foam yoga blocks beneath our housings, which worked brilliantly to hoist them half in and half out for the shot. Mid-morning and mid-afternoon give the best light, but it is important to wait for a sunny day for the optimum pictures. ■

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# DIVING WITH... MARCIA RIEDERER

PT Hirschfield chats with the wildly successful underwater photographer whose passion for nature echoes her biology and conservation background

Photography by Marcia Riederer or as credited



Marcia's dive van  
© Russell Charters



Marcia in her happy place  
© Russell Charters

**A**ward-winning land and underwater photographer Marcia Riederer is a biologist with enviable, global photographic accomplishments. These include Ocean Photographer of the Year 2025 (Winner of Fine Art and Canon Special Award); Underwater Awards Australasia 2025 (Gold Winner, Australian Category), Through Your Lens Photo Contest 2024 (Overall Winner and Second Place, Behaviour Category), alongside many more competition awards.

Marcia was a category winner in the Australian Geographic Nature Photographer of the Year in 2019: 'I also got a few prizes in the Ecological Society of Australia, including the overall winner in 2023.'

Despite her abundant success, Marcia remains humble: 'I also have extensive experience in not winning competitions.'

'When recognition does come, especially in the form of a nice prize, it's affirming and confidence-boosting. While it opens doors and allows me to meet people that I wouldn't otherwise, the greatest reward remains the privilege of diving and creating images at all.'

Marcia was born in Brazil. She spent the first 30 years of her life there, mostly on the island of Florianopolis.

'Growing up on an island, surrounded by more than 100 beaches, naturally shaped my connection with the ocean.'

Going to the beach was an essential part of my childhood and remained so into adulthood. The ocean has always been a place of comfort, curiosity, and belonging for me.'

Driven by her passion for animals, Marcia studied Biological Sciences.

'My first professional experience was a six-month internship in north-east Brazil, working on sea turtle conservation. We patrolled beaches to monitor nesting females, relocating nests from unsafe areas and releasing hatchlings. We delivered environmental education programs in small coastal communities.'

After graduating and having her son, Marcia worked across several conservation projects, moving throughout Brazil. In 2008, she migrated to Australia and settled in Melbourne. Work took Marcia far from the ocean to

Minke whale encounter.  
2025 OPY & Underwater winner



“ While naming Lady Elliot Island ‘an absolute favourite’ destination, it’s her images of minke whales that have garnered Marcia global underwater acclaim ”

Mildura. Ironically, Marcia completed her scuba training in here in 2011. 'I discovered a local dive club called the Desert Divers. It was my way of staying connected to the sea, even while living far from it.'

Since 2021, Marcia's been based on the Bellarine Peninsula, where the sea is again part of her everyday life. Photography has long been a creative outlet for her, from chasing auroras and experimenting with astrophotography to making images of flora and fauna.

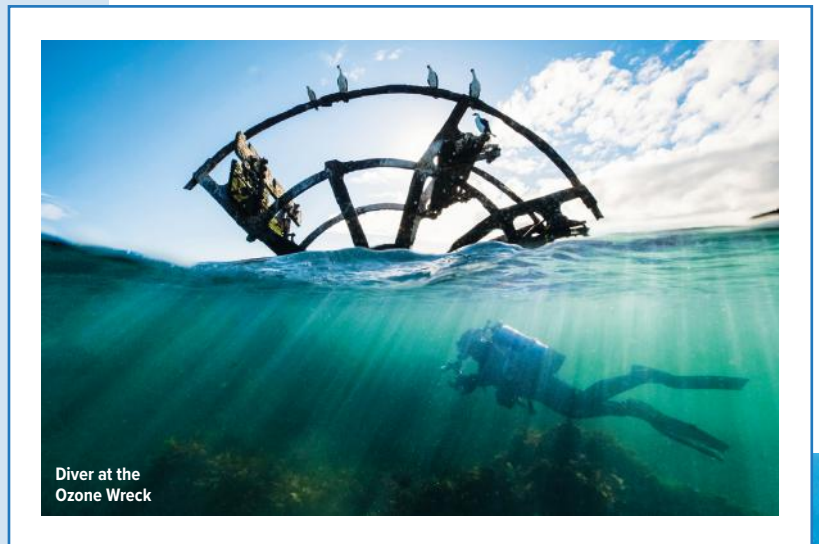
'My photographic journey began on land. Work took me to remote locations, and I started carrying a camera everywhere. I also documented my son growing up. For a long time, I believed underwater photography was out of reach. Too expensive, too technically demanding, and too difficult to balance with work and life commitments. But after I dived with a camera for the first time, I could count on one hand the number of dives I've done without one.'

Marcia's particularly drawn to animal behaviour, largely because of its storytelling power: 'Witnessing something unique, even from a commonly seen species, feels special. I believe that sense of discovery resonates with audiences and competition judges alike.'

Marcia and her partner Russell (also a gifted photographer) are passionate about their local diving. They delight in shallow shore dives, often no deeper than 5m. They've constructed an epic 'dive van' to accommodate their scuba tanks, wet gear and photography equipment. It's fully self-contained so they can free-camp when travelling.

'The van has completely changed how I dive. It allows me to cross the bay and stay for several days. It makes night dives far more practical. It gives us freedom to prepare food, change comfortably and keep all our gear organised wherever we go.'

Marcia believes the diving in Port Phillip bay is highly underrated: 'It took me a long time to discover it.' Each of the dive sites, mostly piers, has its own characteristics



and charismatic species. Also due to the round shape of the bay, we can get a dive anywhere almost under any conditions.' Her favourite local site is Cottage by the Sea in Queenscliff: 'It's moody and requires the right combination of tide and wind, which only adds to its charm. The site features beautiful ledges covered in sponges and gorgonian corals, regular encounters with cuttlefish and blue devils, passing rays.'

In addition to adventures in Fiji and Thailand, Marcia has also enjoyed diving with the seals at Narooma NSW, ▶



Octopus hunting in the reef at Lady Elliot Island



The Blue Devil smile



Underwater rugby

“ The encounter was calm and beautiful, but so unexpected that my buddy and I ended the dive shortly after. Minutes later, I regretted not staying longer and considered re-entering the water ”

cuttlefish in Whyalla South Australia and photographing pygmy pipefish in Kamay Botony Bay National Park.

While naming Lady Elliot Island ‘an absolute favourite’ destination, it’s her images of minke whales that have garnered Marcia global underwater acclaim.

‘My first in-water encounter with a whale was a minke, about ten years ago on a day dive from Cairns. The encounter was brief. The image I captured on a hired camera was very blurry, but unforgettable.’

In 2023, Marcia joined a multi-day liveaboard, focused on minke whales.

‘The experience was extraordinary. Ocean conditions were ideal. We spent hours in the water with up to eight whales circling, approaching and interacting just metres away. Photography wasn’t my priority. I was there purely for the experience.’ She was so deeply affected that she booked again the following year, with encounters just as powerful. She’s booked in again for mid-2026.

‘As cliché as it sounds, the feeling of such a large, intelligent animal choosing to spend time with us is

priceless. There’s no chasing involved. We hold onto a mermaid line at the back of the boat, giving the whales complete control of the interaction.’

Marcia also recalls one particularly vivid memory during the spider crab aggregation, when a large sevengill shark unexpectedly appeared.

‘The encounter was calm and beautiful, but so unexpected that my buddy and I ended the dive shortly after. Minutes later, I regretted not staying longer and considered re-entering the water. But delayed adrenaline hit, and I became so nervous I nearly let my camera drift away.’

Megafauna remains high on Marcia’s Bucket List: ‘Swimming with orcas is high on my list, as is diving in Antarctica. Both are logistically complex and expensive, so I’m not sure when or if they’ll happen, but the dream remains.’

For many years, Marcia worked for the Victorian Government, assessing threats to native flora and fauna species and developing conservation policies in partnership with stakeholders. She’s recently stepped away from that work and is ‘now standing at the threshold of an unknown ▶

# 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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Education & Training Workshops & Startups



Themed Activities

## Show Summary

# 80+

Exhibitors

# 20+

Workshops

# 50+

Speakers

# 4000+

Visitors

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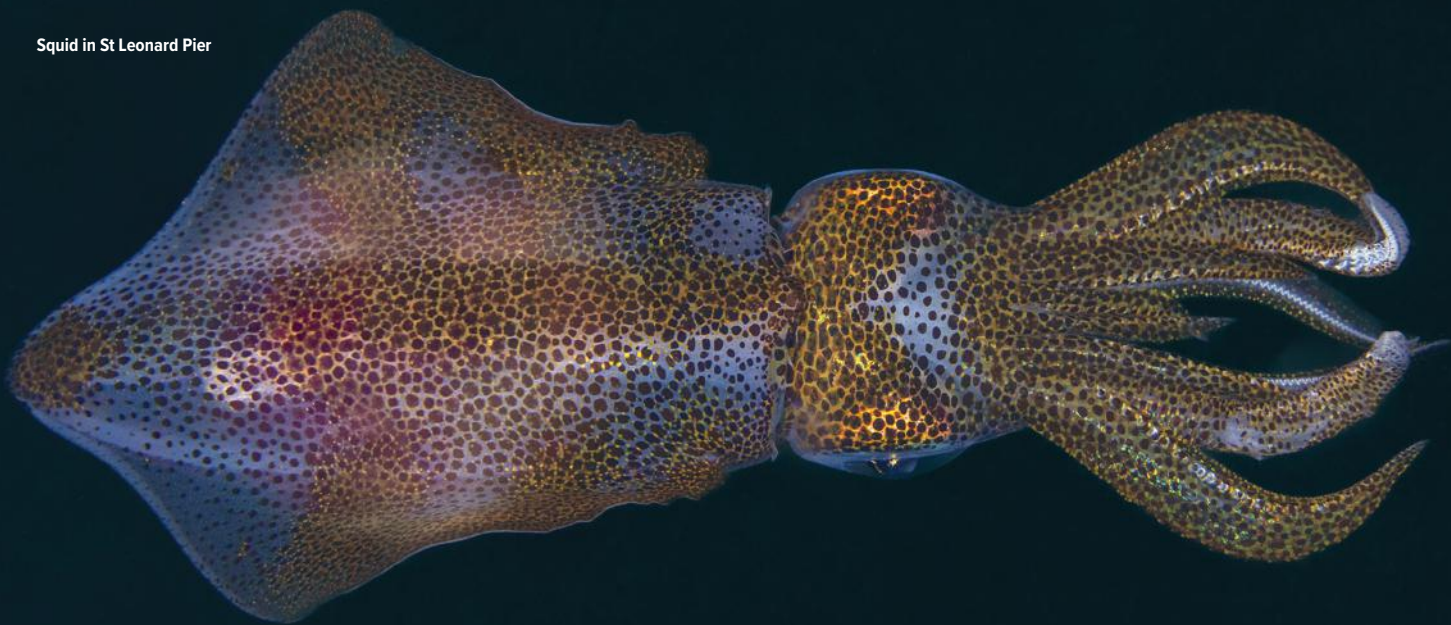
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Squid in St Leonard Pier



Low tide on the reef creates perfect split shot opportunities



Coral and glassfish in the Adman Sea, Thailand

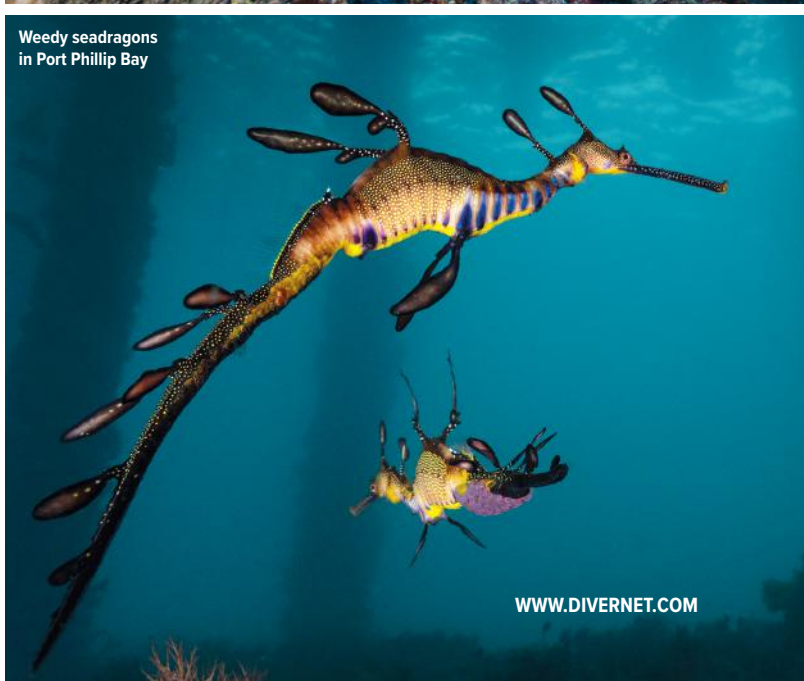
but exciting next chapter.' 'My background in ecology and conservation strongly influences my photography. I aim to showcase the beauty of the underwater world while encouraging reflection and change. That could be viewers reconsidering their daily habits, or understanding how individual actions contribute to broader environmental impacts.'

On a local level, Marcia laments the amount of rubbish beneath piers, particularly fishing debris, as 'heartbreaking': 'I remove what I can on every dive, yet it never seems to decrease.'

On a broader scale, she believes 'the core issue is humanity's belief that we are more important than all other species. Immediate human wants consistently outweigh the survival of ecosystems. Even from a purely self-interested perspective, it's illogical.'

'I find it very scary to think that some species are disappearing, and many of them we don't even know yet. There's no future for humans on a sick planet.'

You can explore more of Marcia's photographic work on Instagram and [marciariederer.com](http://marciariederer.com)



Weedy seadragons in Port Phillip Bay

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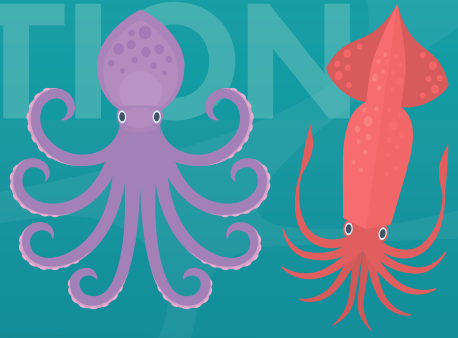


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# CONSERVATION CORNER



## How Can We Help?

William Gladstone discusses ways in which divers can assist marine life that has been injured or become ensnared in fishing equipment

Photographs courtesy of William Gladstone

**T**he long-finned pike was struggling helplessly on the bottom of Chowder Bay in Sydney, one of my regular dive sites. Its back was broken, almost severed by what looked like an unsuccessful attack by a predator. Its flesh was torn and its breathing was laboured. It looked like it was suffering.

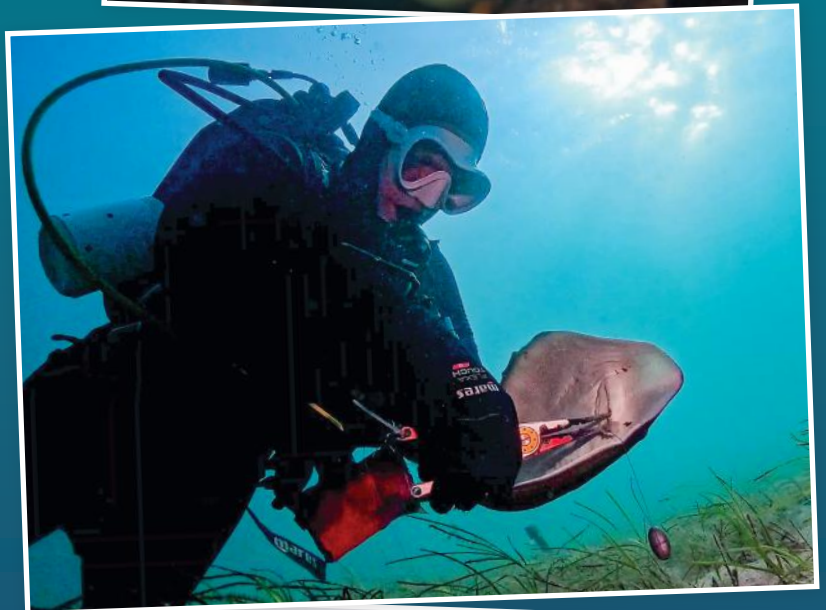
Chowder Bay is popular with fishers and I often see fish, rays and octopuses with hooks piercing their jaws or body, terrible wounds from fighting their capture, and fishing line trailing behind them.

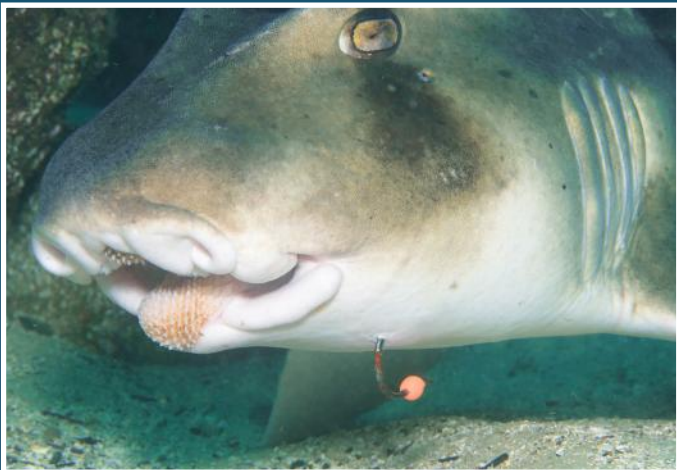
We scuba divers have the unique opportunity to see up-close the greatest wonders of the natural world: mass mating aggregations of giant Australian cuttlefish, gatherings of grey nurse sharks, and seahorses giving birth. Diving regularly in the same site we come to know the resident marine animals and they, in turn, lose their natural fear of us. We experience tender moments when an animal connects with us, such as an octopus reaching out to explore our hand. We become emotionally attached to them and feel sad when we see one of them with a severe injury or struggling with a fishhook embedded in its body.

When I saw the pike I wanted to ease its suffering, even though its injury was a natural occurrence. I grabbed it firmly and, with the trauma shears I always carry when diving at Chowder Bay to cut myself free from fishing line, I quickly euthanised it.

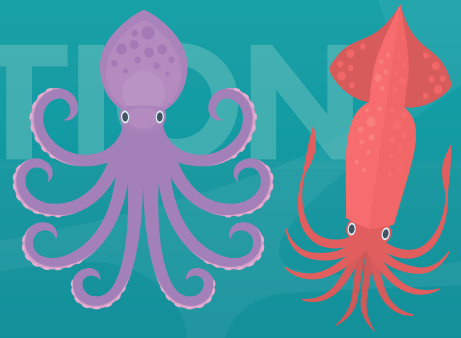
But was the pike actually 'suffering'? It's tempting to believe that fish are simple, living machines that respond to an injury with a simple reflex and are incapable of feeling pain in the same way we and other vertebrates do. Believing this makes it easier for us to accept the many ways we treat fish for our sport, food, and entertainment. But science is telling us a vastly different story. The evidence from years of research shows that fish experience suffering, meaning they feel stress, fear and pain. Professor Culum Brown, from Macquarie University in Sydney who is a highly respected fish cognition researcher, has written that 'fish experience pain in a manner similar to the rest of the vertebrates'.

These injuries we see, whether a result of fishing or the outcome of a predator's unsuccessful attack, cause ►





# CONSERVATION CORNER



**“ Jules advice for divers wanting to help is to ‘always carry marine grade stainless steel pliers and a line cutter and learn how best to remove a hook from a fish, ray or shark ’ ”**

suffering to fishes, as well as to stingrays and octopus. Many divers are driven to help when they find an animal in these situations. If, like me, you feel the need to help, how can we help? Jules Casey is a Melbourne-based diver and underwater photographer who is known around the world for her social media posts as @onebreathdiver. Jules has rescued countless fish, sharks, and rays from hooks and lines and documented them in her social media posts. Sadly, she has also witnessed people’s deliberate cruelty to marine animals where the only feasible help was to quickly euthanise the animal.

Jules told me that her ‘most memorable encounter was when I was photographing baby seahorses at Blairgowrie. I thought my buddy nudged me in the back to gain my attention. I turned around to find a huge Melbourne skate with a large hook embedded in its face on the surface. I tried for about 15 minutes to remove the hook as the skate circled around and kept coming up to me. My buddy tried to help but he couldn’t remove the hook either. The next day I purchased pliers and a line cutter so that I was never in a situation where I couldn’t assist’.

Jules advice for divers wanting to help is to ‘always carry marine grade stainless steel pliers and a line cutter and learn how best to remove a hook from a fish, ray or shark. Learning how best to handle marine life without stressing them further is helpful. Often it’s best to have your dive buddy hold it while you remove the hook or cut it free from fishing gear’.

Sometimes it’s not possible to help. I have used my trauma shears many times to cut the fishing line but couldn’t remove the hook. I hope that what I was able to do at least prevented the animal from getting tangled and tied up in kelp. For some animals, such as rays with venomous barbs, it can be too risky to our own safety to help them.

Removing a fishhook and line, or quickly euthanising a suffering fish, undoubtedly reduces their suffering. I’ve focused on the impacts of fishing because it’s something we often see while diving and can personally do something about. For other larger animals, such as seals, turtles, sea birds and larger sharks, contact experienced agencies and volunteer organizations like ORRCA, Marine Wildlife Rescue, zoos, state fisheries, and Sea World. ■



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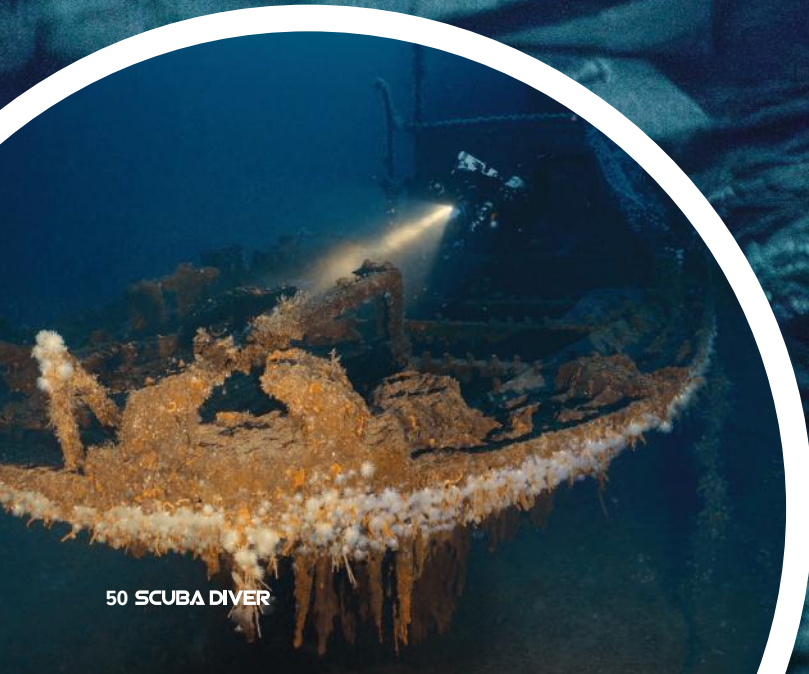
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# HIDDEN WORLDS

*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 travelling with five large cases. One for the rebreather, one for dive gear - fins, masks, stage regulators, drysuit, reels, spares - and the rest for cameras, housings, lights, audio gear and batteries.

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

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

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

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

### *Did you know?*

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

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

Photographs by Ingo Leuschner, plus stills from Hidden Worlds



### Batteries

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

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

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

### The camera problem

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

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

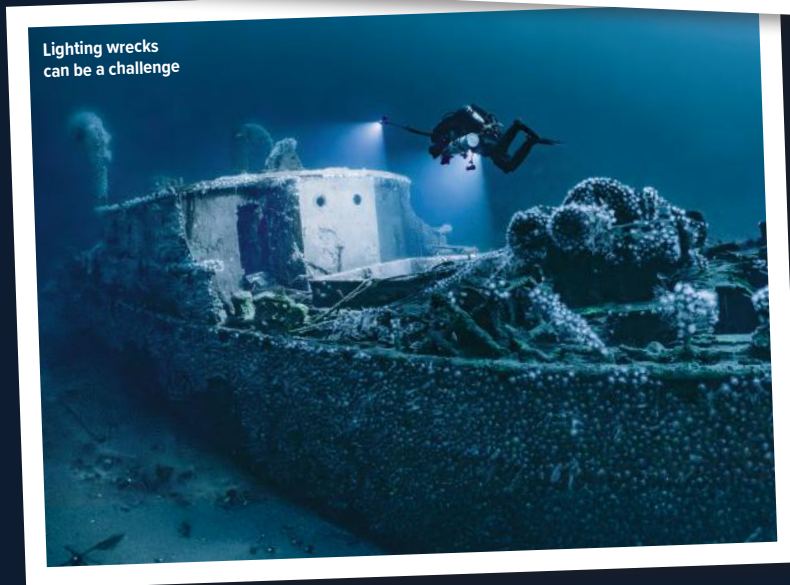
### 90m – Viknor

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

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



Casement on a battleship off Malin Head



Lighting wrecks can be a challenge

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

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

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

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### When the ocean decides

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

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

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

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

### Caves, mines — and zero visibility

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

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

CCRs give longer  
dive times



Tanks lying on the seabed  
off Malin Head



Eerie sight on a  
dive underground



Illuminating a  
ship's wheel





Stern of a wreck festooned in marine growth

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



Diver near the remains of a propeller

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

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

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

**When it comes together**

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

**The hidden world beneath us**

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

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

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



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**F**or Australians, it can feel as though the diving world is already on your doorstep. The Great Barrier Reef, Ningaloo, the Neptune Islands - it's just the start of an enviable list of amazing sites in your own country, which mean you might not have to travel far to experience world-class diving. Which is exactly why it tends to take something genuinely different to draw attention elsewhere.

The Solomon Islands fit that description. And they do so without making a great deal of noise about it. Because while they carry a reputation for being remote, the reality is more straightforward - from Brisbane, it's around a three-hour flight to Honiara, which is considerably less time than it takes to reach large parts of your own state.

That contrast between perception and reality is one of the more-interesting aspects of travelling here.

One of the more-persistent assumptions is that the Solomon Islands are difficult to access. In practice, the journey is relatively uncomplicated. Direct flights from Brisbane mean departing in the morning and arriving at a civilised time in the afternoon. There's no need for overnight travel or multiple connections.

Arrival is generally smooth. Immigration is uncomplicated, transfers are very short, and within a relatively brief window you're at your accommodation or dive base. There's time to organise equipment, check kit, and settle in. The following morning - you're in the water.

That ease of access changes how the destination is perceived. Rather than being reserved for longer, more-complex trips, it also becomes a realistic option for a shorter break - one that can be planned without committing significant time to travel.

Once in the water, the differences become more apparent. Sea temperatures remain consistently between 29-31°C throughout the year. For Australian divers used to seasonal variation - and even when compared with other Pacific destinations such as Fiji - that consistency is noticeable. It allows for lighter equipment, longer dives and a more-comfortable overall experience. The diving itself is also relatively straightforward to access. Many of the sites around Honiara are reached within a short boat journey, and in some cases directly from the shoreline. Travel time is minimal, which means more time in the water. ▶

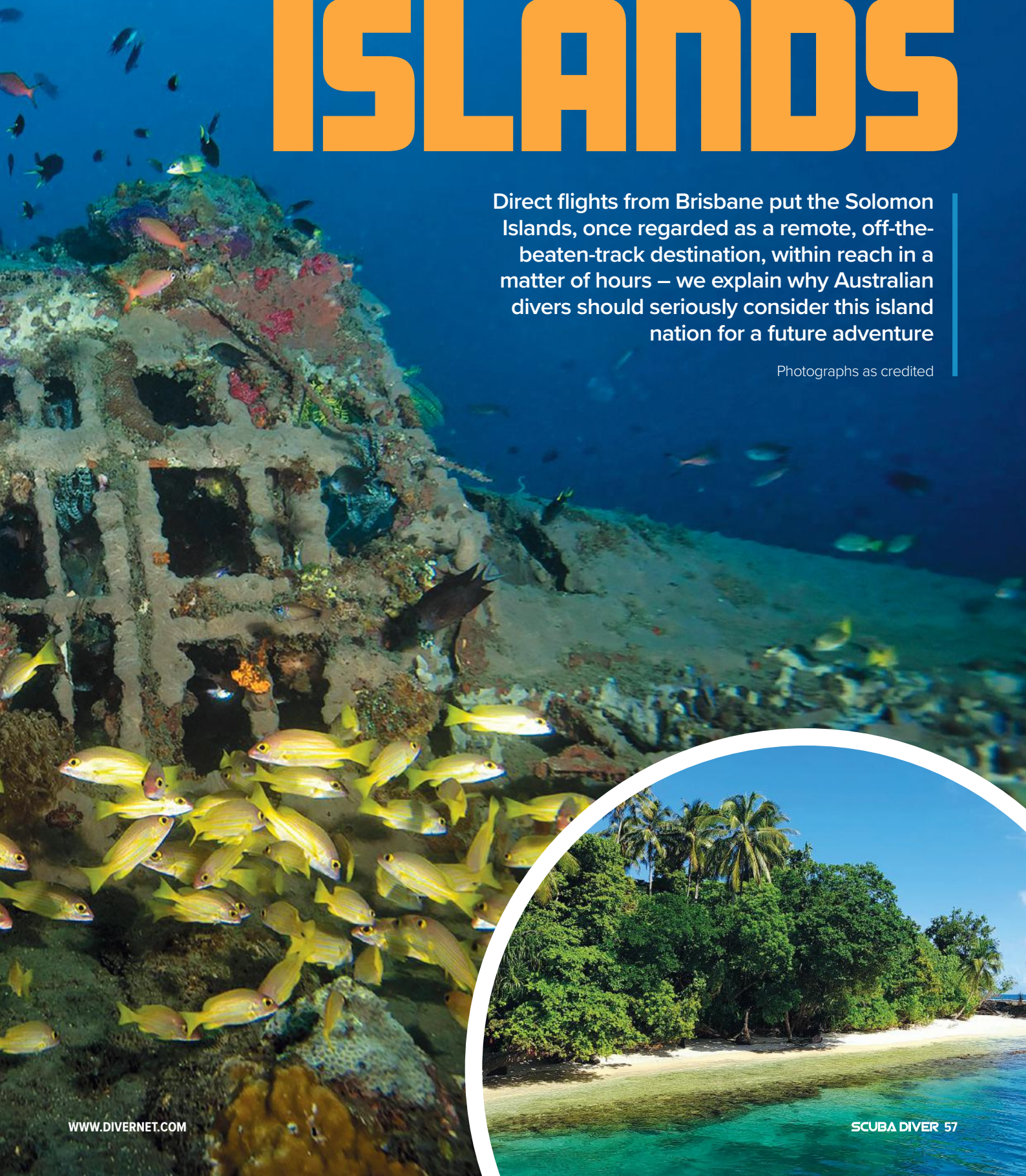
# THE



# SOLOMON ISLANDS

Direct flights from Brisbane put the Solomon Islands, once regarded as a remote, off-the-beaten-track destination, within reach in a matter of hours – we explain why Australian divers should seriously consider this island nation for a future adventure

Photographs as credited



Conditions are typically calm, with good visibility and manageable currents. It's an environment that accommodates a broad range of experience levels. For those learning to dive, or looking to build confidence, the conditions are forgiving. There is space, time and a pace that allows for development without pressure.

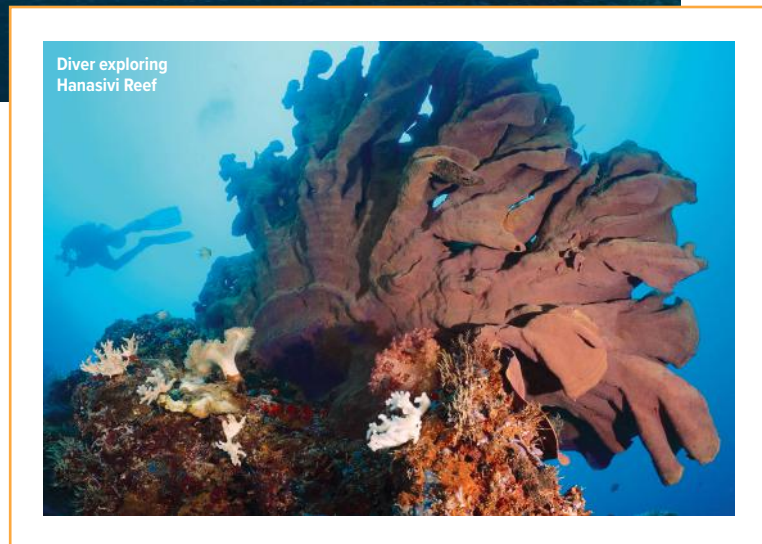
For more-experienced divers, the appeal lies in being able to develop your skills in a different environment while taking in the incredible sights on offer - doing so without crowds so you can take a more-considered approach to each site. Perhaps the most-noticeable aspect, though, is the atmosphere. This is not a high-volume tourism destination. There are no lines of boats waiting on moorings, no sense of moving through a schedule dictated by demand. Instead, there is a slower, more-measured pace. Diving here tends to feel experiential rather than routine. For Australians familiar with the busier parts of Southeast Asia, that contrast is clear. The overall tone is quieter, less commercial, and more relaxed than many of the region's more-established resort destinations.

It is, in many ways, a more-understated experience.

And despite some occasional external perceptions of the country being shaped by media headlines, the reality on arrival is generally reassuring. Honiara and its surrounding areas are accustomed to international visitors. English is widely spoken, and dive operations are established and professionally run.



Drone shot of the Kinugawa Maru wreck



Diver exploring Hanasivi Reef

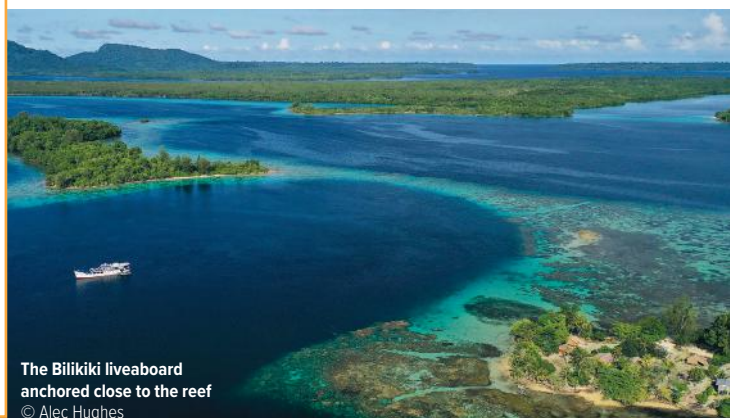


The B17 Flying Fortress is now home to a plethora of marine life

As with travel anywhere, a degree of awareness is sensible, but for divers travelling with a clear itinerary, the experience tends to be straightforward and comfortable. It is not uncommon to hear that the destination feels easier and more accessible than expected.

Cost is another area where perception and reality don't always align. Flight prices can vary, and some options appear high at first glance. However, with forward planning, competitive fares are often available from Australia. When combined with the short travel time and efficient dive logistics, the overall value becomes more apparent. Less time spent travelling tends to translate into more time diving, and it is the diving itself that ultimately defines the Solomon Islands. While the reefs are healthy and marine life is abundant (this is the Coral Triangle, after all), it is the historical dimension that sets this destination apart. The waters around Guadalcanal were the site of intense naval and aerial conflict during World War Two. The scale of losses was such that the area became known as Iron Bottom Sound.

Those remnants remain in place today. Not preserved behind barriers or removed from their setting, but lying where they came to rest, accessible to divers within recreational depth limits. Diving these sites carries a different kind of presence. Ships remain upright, their structures intact though softened by coral growth. Aircraft lie on the seabed with recognisable outlines, their details still visible. An example of this is the B-17E Flying Fortress, known as 'Bessie the Jap Basher'. So well preserved is she that the maker's name – Goodyear – is still clearly readable on her tyres. It is not simply a visual experience, though, but a contextual one. ▶



The Bilikiki liveaboard anchored close to the reef  
© Alec Hughes



Anemonefish in Maravaghi Bay



Bilikiki liveaboard

## Famous 5 Solomons sites to explore

- 1 B-17 Flying Fortress (Bessie the Jap Basher)** – Few dive experiences compare to descending onto a World War Two bomber. Resting in relatively shallow water, this American B-17 is remarkably recognisable, with wings, fuselage and features still clearly visible. It's an evocative dive that connects you directly to history.
- 2 Hirokawa Maru** – Also known as Bonegi 1, it was a 6,860-ton Japanese vessel that beached during the Battle of Guadalcanal and subsequently sank after being subjected to heavy bombing by the US Air Force. The wreck has become a reef hosting diverse corals, fish, and other marine organisms.
- 3 Kyushu Maru** – A Japanese transport ship that lies in Iron Bottom Sound, a stretch of water named for the numerous ships and aircraft sunk there. The wreck is encrusted with corals and sponges, attracting a diverse array of marine life, including schools of snapper, fusiliers, trevally, lionfish, nudibranchs, and anemonefish.
- 4 Twin Tunnels** – This large seamount features two tunnels that drop vertically and exit into a cave. Swimming out of the cave to the sheer wall, you'll encounter schools of fusiliers and grey reef sharks cruising by.
- 5 Tanavula Point** – A gently sloping reef offering encounters with pelagics like eagle rays, dogtooth tuna, and occasional sharks, making it suitable for both novice and advanced divers.

“ That combination of accessibility and historical significance is what gives the Solomon Islands much of their appeal. You do not need specialist training or complex planning to experience it ”

### Did you know?

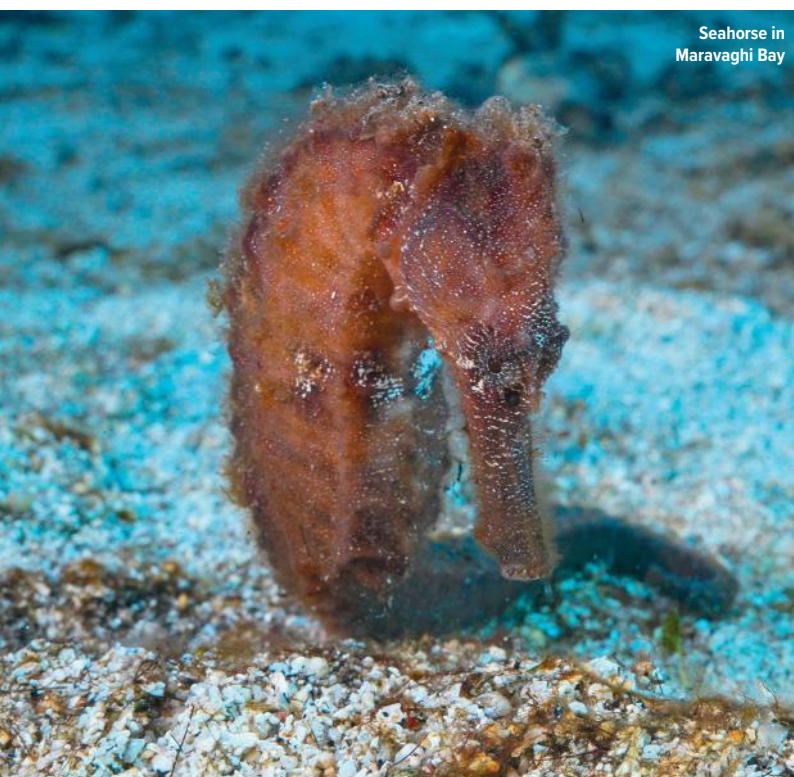
The Solomon Islands, particularly around Ironbottom Sound and Guadalcanal, offer world-class diving with numerous World War Two ship and aircraft wrecks. Key sites include the Bonegi freighters, Toa Maru, and various planes like the B17 Flying Fortress.

Diver exploring one of the many wrecks on offer in the Solomon Islands

The history, and loss, remains tangible. There is a sense of immediacy to diving from Honiara - an understanding that these are not reconstructions or replicas, but original artefacts in their original environment. It encourages a slower approach, a closer look, and a degree of reflection.

That combination of accessibility and historical significance is what gives the Solomon Islands much of their appeal. You do not need specialist training or complex planning to experience it. The logistics are simple, the sites are within reach, and the experience is direct. And for many divers, that is what leaves the strongest impression.

For Australians in particular, the Solomon Islands are not a replacement for what exists closer to home. They offer something different. A destination that feels removed from the familiar, yet is reached with relative ease. Warm water, accessible diving, and a landscape shaped as much by history as by marine life. All within a few hours of departure. And perhaps that balance - between simplicity and difference - is what makes it increasingly difficult to overlook. ■



Seahorse in  
Maravaghi Bay

## Emperor Divers

Solitude is one of the real draws of diving in the Solomon Islands. With relatively few operators in the region, there are correspondingly few boats - and that often means having dive sites largely to yourself. Emperor Divers are one of the few to offer liveaboard experiences, with Bilikiki having explored these waters for decades. In 2025, they expanded their presence with the opening of Emperor Divers Honiara, a land-based centre offering day diving from the capital, meaning their extensive local knowledge is also accessible to divers who may not have the time for longer liveaboard itineraries.

Overseeing operations is Solomon Islands General Manager Dave Pearce, who has built up a deep understanding of the waters around Guadalcanal and beyond. Originally from Adelaide, he moved to the Solomons more than a decade ago to work with Solomon Airlines, before deciding after Covid to turn a long-standing passion for diving into a full-time career.

He has no doubt what makes the country so special. "Diversity," he says. "It has some of the most-amazing beaches on the planet, the most-amazing corals, fish life, reef life, and fauna from macro to megafauna, pelagics - and anything else you can think of.

"Plus there is the history, from the headhunters, kastom (the traditional knowledge, culture, and beliefs passed down through generations) and cultural dances; World War Two shipwrecks, and walking on the ground of some of the most-brutal battlefields of the conflict. "The Solomons has everything."

Emperor Divers Honiara's guides are able to offer a wide range of diving to suit all levels. Whether you are a recreational diver looking to explore, a lapsed diver looking to refresh, a complete novice wanting to experience diving for the first time, or a veteran of the underwater world looking for your next adventure, their experienced team can provide the help you need. Those looking for a longer stay can get the full Solomon Islands experience by taking a liveaboard trip on Emperor Bilikiki. Differing lengths of trip are available with plenty of chance to explore this incredible country, its culture and its marine life.

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# Ribbon Reefs of the GBR

The Great Barrier Reef is over 2,300km long and dotted with some amazing dive destinations. However, there is one part of the reef that is very special to Nigel Marsh and that he keeps returning to year after year - the outstanding Ribbon Reefs

Photographs by Nigel Marsh / [www.nigelmarshphotography.com](http://www.nigelmarshphotography.com)

**T**he Ribbon Reefs are a string of barrier reefs, north of Cairns, that stretch for over 100km. Numbered one to ten, these reefs have beautiful coral gardens, sloping walls and spectacular pinnacles for divers to explore and are famous for abundant fishes, potato cod and dwarf minke whales in winter.

Beyond the Ribbon Reefs, deep in the Coral Sea, Osprey Reef offers very different diving, with oversized corals, sheer walls and incredible shark encounters. Combining these two on a liveaboard trip and you get some of the most-outstanding diving in the world.

One vessel that regularly visits this area is the wonderful Spoilsport, operated by Mike Ball Dive Expeditions. I first dived off Spoilsport in 1989, on its second-ever voyage, and have had many wonderful trips on this fabulous liveaboard over the years. The 30-metre-long catamaran is still one of the best liveaboard vessels in the world, due to meticulous maintenance and regular refits. The vessel host 26 guests, has a large dive deck, a spacious dining and lounge area, a large sundeck and even an alfresco party area.

The food, staff and service are always first class, and it was no different on my most recent trip. Each week Spoilsport departs Cairns for a three-day trip to the Ribbon Reefs and then a four-day trip that combines the Ribbon Reefs and Osprey Reef. However, they also offer special trips to the Far Northern Reefs, the SS Yongala and the Coral Sea Reefs. Our trip was supposed to be one visiting the Coral Sea Reefs. However, very weather dependant, being over 200km offshore, these trips don't always go to plan.

Arriving in Cairns in late-December to gloomy wet conditions, the wet season had arrived early, and the forecast was a little iffy to say the least. Boarding Spoilsport

late in the afternoon, I met my fellow divers and crew, a mixed group from across the planet. Trip director Keiran briefed us on the vessel and then gave us the sad news that we wouldn't be spending six days in the Coral Sea as planned, as unpredictable northerly winds were forecast. Thank goodness we still had the all-weather Ribbon Reefs as a fall back.

## The wonderful Ribbons

Overnight we travelled 150km north of Cairns to our first dive site, Summer Bay on Ribbon Reef No.3. There are over 100 dive sites on the Ribbon Reefs, and new sites are still being discovered each year. This was my eighth trip to the Ribbon Reefs, and this pretty sloping reef was a new site for me. Dotted with coral heads, we had two lovely dives, enjoying 30-metre visibility.

On the sand was a large colony of spotted garden eels, while above us was a constant parade of pelagic fish like



“ I first dived this site 30 years ago and it is great to see the coral gardens as healthy as ever and overloaded with schooling snapper, sweetlips and red bass ”

### *Did you know?*

The potato cod is a large, curious reef-dwelling fish, often weighing up to 100kg and reaching two metres in length. They are light grey or brownish-grey with dark brown/black blotches and spots, often with dark streaks radiating from their eyes.

The next morning we arrived at Ribbon Reef No. 10. Our morning dive at Coral Kingdom was spectacular with healthy coral gardens, reef sharks, barracuda, turtles and a massive school of bumphead parrotfish. However, other divers saw a reef manta ray, a spotted eagle ray and a rare bowmouth wedgefish. Looks like I went the wrong way on that dive!

Next, we had two magic dives at Two Towers. These two pinnacles of coral rise from 20m to 2m and are surrounded by a reef cut by ledges. We encountered schools of snapper, barracuda and trevally, plus giant Maori wrasse, reef sharks, green turtles and coral trout. The hard coral gardens on the peak these pinnacles are stunning and swarmed with reef fishes. The afternoon and night dive were at another new site dictated by the northerly winds at Pixie Wildside. This was another pretty wall decorated with hard corals. There were lots of reef fish and a broadclub cuttlefish, however I was most amazed to see three groups of swallowtail angelfish, three males and six females. It was no wonder I had never seen these lovely angelfish on the Ribbon Reefs before, as it appeared they like the exposed and rarely dived southern side of the reefs.

After a lovely morning dive at the always-spectacular Lighthouse Bommie, seeing a good collection of pelagic fish, we headed over to the legendary Cod Hole. I first dived this site 30 years ago and it is great to see the coral gardens as healthy as ever and overloaded with schooling snapper, sweetlips and red bass. The famous potato cod are no longer fed, and only two to four are seen on most dives, but they are still very friendly and happy to pose for photos. ▶

mackerel, trevally and schools of fusiliers. We explored coral heads, coral gardens and a wall cut with many ledges, finding sweetlips, coral snapper, angelfish, butterflyfish, rock cods and many other species. Although the conditions were calm, with only light winds and no swell, the northerly winds made site selection for skipper Russell a bit of a headache. Most of their dive sites are generally suited to southerly winds, that prevail for most of the year. However, this made the trip extra special for me as we got to dive many sites that are rarely visited, including our afternoon dive at Ribbon Reef No.5 at Clam Beds Wildside.

The wall at this site drops from 2m to 20m and is decorated with soft corals, sea whips and gorgonians. Cruising the wall we spotted grey reef sharks, schools of fusiliers and surgeonfish, a giant moray and few nudibranchs. There was also a great variety of reef fish, including clown and harlequin triggerfish, hawkfish, wrasse, parrotfish and damsels. I got a wonderful surprise when I spotted a rare male swallowtail angelfish. This species has different colours for the males and females, and this was the first time I had seen this lovely striped fish on the Ribbon Reefs.

Snake Pit was our afternoon and night dive site. It used to be a reliable spot for olive sea snakes, but they are rarely seen in the area now. This large rocky mound rises from 30m to 15m and has lovely corals and lots of reef and pelagic fishes. The night dive was excellent, seeing shrimps, crabs, lionfish, morays, spiny lobster and slipper lobster. That evening, after another wonderful meal, we got the great news that we would be able to venture out to Osprey Reef, unfortunately only for the day as the winds were still unpredictable.

### A day at Osprey

The 120km crossing to Osprey Reef was very smooth, and in the morning we found ourselves at the rarely dived southern tip, called Rapid Horn. Usually, the crew do a shark feed at the northern tip of Osprey Reef at North Horn. We were going to miss the shark feed, however diving Rapid Horn more than made up for this disappointment.

Over two dives we explored a series of ridges covered in dense hard corals that led to the edge of the reef before plunging into deep water. At the drop-off were cruising reef sharks and passing pelagic fish, including schools of bigeye trevally and barracuda, plus mackerel, jobfish and rainbow runner. There were also numerous reef fishes, including a few that are rare or not seen on the Great Barrier Reef, including reticulated butterflyfish, flame angelfish and Woodhead's angelfish. We then moved to False Entrance and over two dives explored gutters and the lovely wall at this site. This wall is covered in glorious soft corals and fans, and circling above was a massive school of bigeye trevally. We spotted grey reef sharks and numerous whitetip reef sharks, including a pack of four that were tailing a large giant trevally. I was happy to see a few more unusual fish, including bluehead tilefish, swallowtail angelfish and a lone Watanabe's angelfish.

### Magic Pinnacles

Overnight we headed back to Ribbon Reef No. 10, spending the day around nearby Pixie Reef. Pixie Wall was as lovely as always, with lots of fish and a green turtle. While Pixie Pinnacle was a treat for a fish nerd like me. While there were many larger fish to be seen on this tower of coral, I was looking for smaller critters and was rewarded with ►



Bigeye trevally at Osprey Reef



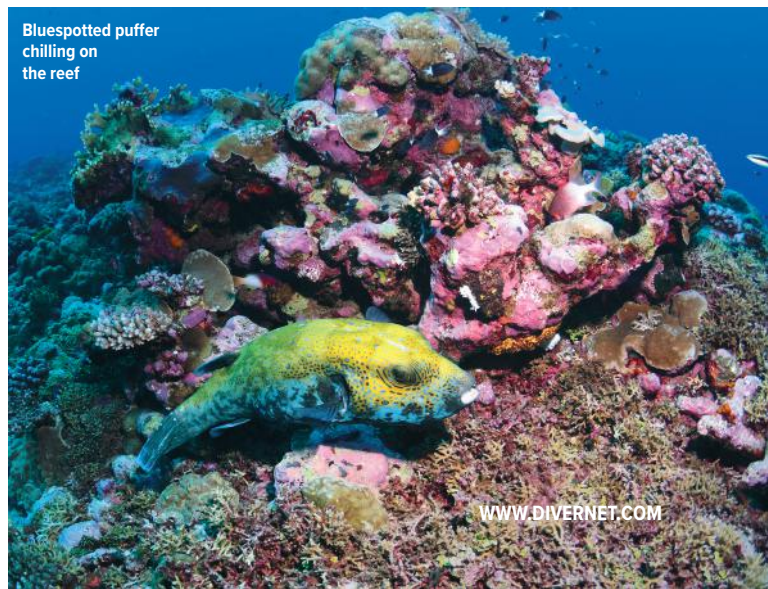
Reticulated butterflyfish



Painted spiny lobster at the Snake Pit



Leopard blenny



Bluespotted puffer chilling on the reef



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nudibranchs, flatworms, tobies, boxfish and many pygmy angelfish. However, the highlight was hiding in a hard coral at the peak, a rare flame hawkfish. This all red hawkfish is rarely seen and very shy, and it led me on a merry chase while trying to take its photo.

The afternoon dive at Vertical Gardens was stunning. This rarely dived site is at the southern end of Pixie Reef and drops from 2m to 30m and is covered in the best collection of colourful corals I have seen on the Ribbon Reefs. The fish life was also wonderful with schooling damselfish, basslets, fusiliers, surgeonfish and snapper.

Our final day found us at Ribbon Reef No.5, diving another new spot called Crack-A-Jack. This is another classic Ribbon pinnacle, rising from 35m to 10m. A Bargibant's pygmy seahorse had been found here recently, so I went looking for it. After searching two fans I was very happy to spot this tiny and well camouflaged seahorse clinging to a similar coloured branch. Doing clockwise circuits around this pinnacle, which is coloured by sea whips, gorgonians, black corals and soft corals, we also found nudibranchs, longnose hawkfish, a leaf scorpionfish, dottybacks, tobies, seawhip gobies, a Morrison's dragonet and a dense school of bigeye trevally.

We then moved south to Ribbon Reef No. 3 to dive my favourite site, the always fabulous Steve's Bommie. This pinnacle rises from 30m to 3m and is always full of surprises. Over two dives we saw reef stonefish, angelfish, boxfish, giant morays, clown anemonefish, snapper, goatfish, mackerel, trevally, unicornfish and nudibranchs. The big surprise for me was finding a rare possum wrasse under a ledge, a species I have never seen in Australian waters before.

Heading back to Cairns overnight we enjoyed a barbeque and a few drinks. As I reviewed my images I knew it wouldn't be long before I returned to explore more of this amazing area of the Great Barrier Reef, and maybe next time spend a little more time in the stunning Coral Sea. ■

### Nigel Marsh Photography

Nigel Marsh has authored over a dozen books on marine life and dive sites, and each year leads special photography group trips to dive destinations across the globe. On these trips Nigel is on hand to help improve your underwater photography and does regular talks on photography and marine life – visit his website for details.

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

The reefs are adorned in marine life

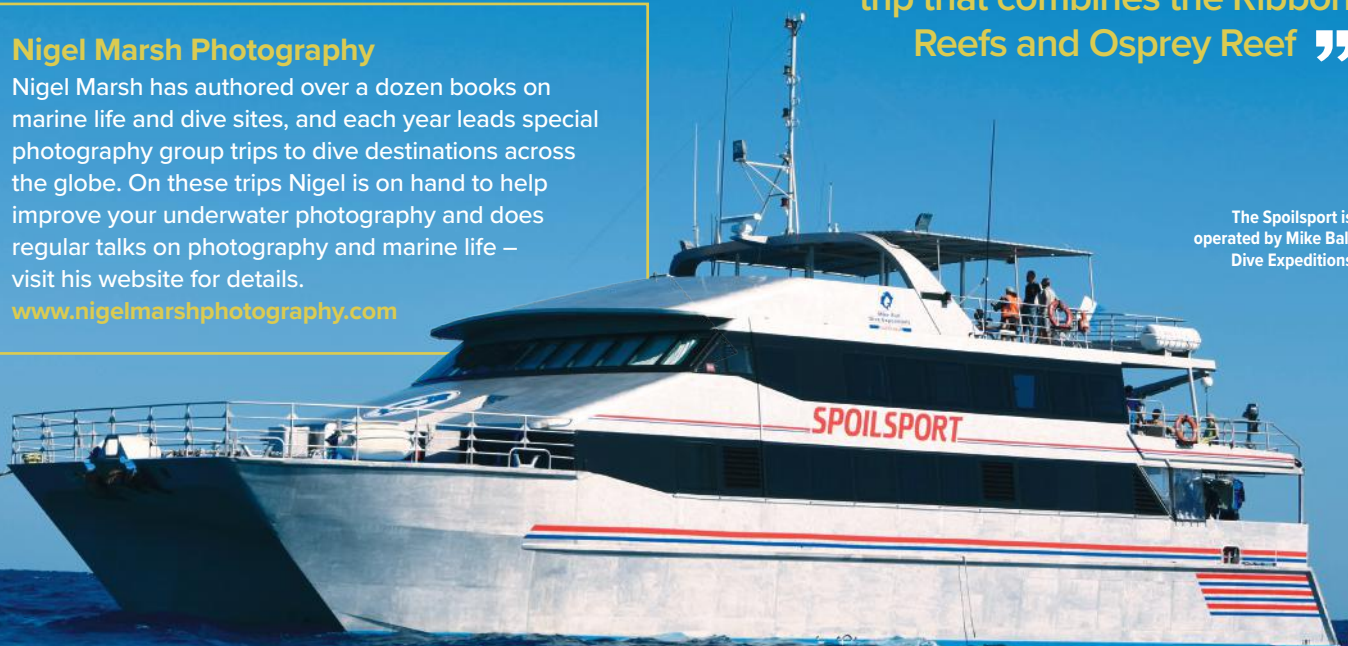


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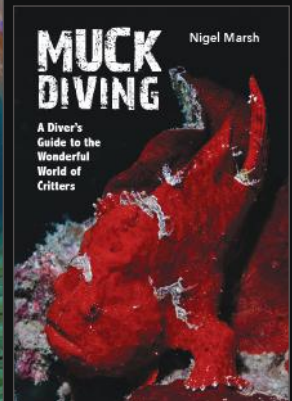
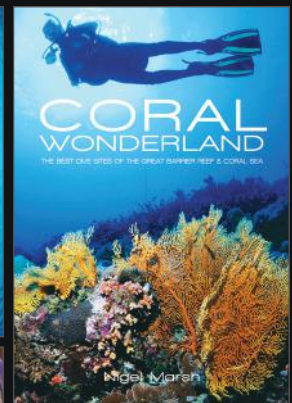
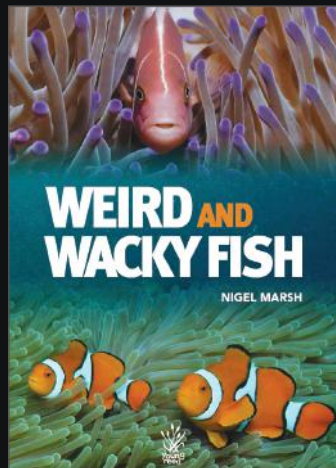
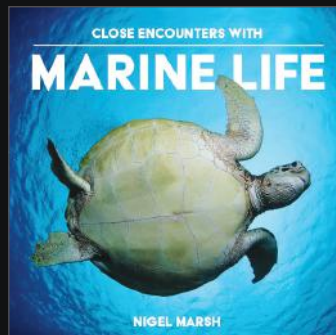
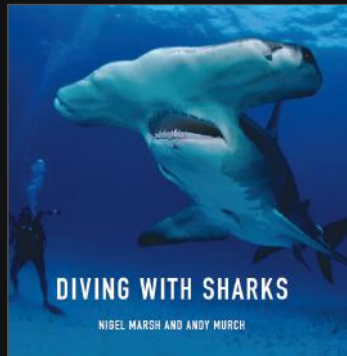
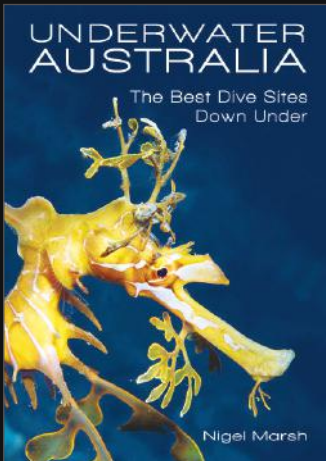


# NIGEL MARSH

## Photography

Nigel Marsh is an Australian photojournalist, underwater photographer and author. Working with New Holland publishers, Nigel has produced a number of guide books for divers and snorkelers, and also a series of children's books with marine related themes.

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# GEAR WHAT'S NEW

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)

## NIKON NIKKOR Z24 - 70MM F/2.8 S II | SRP: \$3,250

Nikon has announced the release of the Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II, a standard zoom lens that is compatible with full-frame/FX-format mirrorless cameras. As part of the S-Line\*1 of Nikkor Z lenses, the Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II is a standard zoom lens with a constant maximum aperture of f/2.8, covering the versatile focal length range from wide-angle 24mm to medium-telephoto 70mm for full-frame/FX-format cameras. It is the first in its class\*2 for which an internal zoom mechanism has been adopted, and it is the lightest in its class\*2, weighing approx. 675g.

The internal zoom mechanism increases zooming stability and dust- and drip-resistant performance. The Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II offers superior reliability and agility for safe and worry-free outdoor shooting. It is the first zoom lens for which the Silky Swift VCM (SSVCM)\*3 has been adopted for the AF drive, achieving the fastest\*4 autofocus in Nikon history with extremely precise and quiet AF control.

Autofocusing is approximately 5x faster than that of the Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S, and AF tracking performance with zooming has been increased by approximately 60%, making it easier to capture decisive moments with rapidly moving subjects such as athletes in action.

In addition, the adoption of a large-diameter double-sided aspherical lens for the front lens element and effective arrangement of ED glass and aspherical lens elements have achieved both a lightweight design and the highest level of image quality in the S-Line lens series. As a new-generation f/2.8 standard zoom lens that combines outstanding image quality and superior agility, the Nikkor Z 24-70mm f/2.8 S II is the lens for those looking for the better performance in both



still-image and video recording, even when shooting in a variety of conditions or harsh environments.

\*1 The S-Line is a grade of NIKKOR Z lenses that demonstrate outstanding optical performance, adhering to a high standard of design principles and quality control.

\*2 Among interchangeable zoom lenses for full-frame/FX-format mirrorless cameras with a focal-length range from 24 mm at the wide-angle end to 70 mm at the telephoto end, and a constant maximum aperture of f/2.8, available as of August 22, 2025. Statement based on Nikon research.

\*3 An AF drive actuator that combines a Voice Coil Motor (VCM) and a guide mechanism developed by Nikon. The VCM is a motor in which a coil reciprocates in a strong magnetic field created by a powerful magnet.

\*4 When used with a camera equipped with the EXPEED 7 image-processing engine. Measured in accordance with Nikon standards.

[www.nikon.com.au](http://www.nikon.com.au)

## SCUBAPRO MK17 EVO 2 / G260 | SRP: FROM \$1,049

For compact comfortable breathing performance in cold or silty water, the MK17 EVO 2/G260 regulator system simply can't be beat. The new sealed balanced diaphragm MK17 EVO 2 is more compact and lighter weight than its MK17 EVO predecessor and the MK19 EVO, with a new forged body, dry chamber with a twin spring layout for increased reliability and compactness.

The MK17 EVO 2 has two HP ports at 15-degree angle to make hose routing easier. Teamed with the unbeatable air-balanced G260, with adjustable breathing controls (cracking resistance knob and Venturi-Initiated Vacuum Assist dive/pre-dive switch), this system can be relied upon to deliver top-of-the-line performance in the most-extreme conditions. Available in Din and Int configurations.

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



## WAYDOO SUBNADO PLUS | SRP: \$1,299



Most sea scooters demand a dedicated hand and constant attention. The Waydoo Subnado Plus rejects that entirely. At just 38cm long and 1.8kg, this ultra-compact powerhouse is small enough to clip off to a D-ring when you're not using it — freeing your hands to manage your gear, adjust your buoyancy, or simply enjoy the dive. When you need it, it's right there. No awkward one-handed swimming, no buddy handing it off.

What makes the Plus genuinely impressive is the power packed into that bottle-sized body. An 800W motor delivers up to 1.7m/s solo and 2.4m/s when paired with a second unit, with a runtime of up to 60 minutes. The quick-release mounting system means you can run it handheld, mount it to your tank, or fix it to your leg — adapting to your dive style on the fly. Depth-rated to 60m, IP68 waterproof, and built from anodised aluminium, it's built for the serious diver. The 144Wh battery fully recharges in 70 minutes via USB-C PD 3.1 and doubles as a power bank for cameras and devices between dives. Travel-ready, dive-ready, and truly versatile — the Subnado Plus changes what's possible underwater.

[www.underwater.com.au](http://www.underwater.com.au)

## MIFLEX DEEP BLACK | SRP: \$51-\$96



Miflex have developed the Deep Black range - a new look for its trusted high-performance hoses and fittings, designed to meet the needs of both technical and recreational divers. The new Deep Black range offers a hand finished matt black aesthetic, delivering a clean, low-profile appearance that integrates seamlessly with modern dive configurations.

Built around Miflex's well-established hose construction, the Deep Black range offers the same flexibility, lightweight handling and durability divers expect, now paired with ceramic-coated black fittings for a consistent and refined finish. This updated finish maintains the familiar Miflex quality performance while providing a uniform, streamlined set-up across regulators and hose routing.

Manufactured in Italy and tested to meet international standards, Miflex hoses are known for their ease of handling, supporting comfort and control both in and out of the water. The new Deep Black finish allows divers to create a cohesive, understated equipment set-up without compromising on the performance Miflex is known for.

[www.miflexdeepblack.co.uk](http://www.miflexdeepblack.co.uk)

## BACKSCATTER REDEFINES THE LIGHTING TOOLKIT



Backscatter has always pushed the boundaries of underwater lighting, and their latest releases confirm that momentum is showing no sign of slowing. Four new products expand what's possible across every level of photo and video underwater.

The Atom Flash (AF-1) is compact but punches hard — a guide number of  $f28$ , 11 manual power levels, Sony/Olympus/OM System TTL, HSS, wireless remote triggering, and over 600 full-power flashes per charge. Its auto-rotating LCD and sub-second recycle time make it a serious contender for travel photographers who refuse to sacrifice performance for portability.

The Mini Flash 3 (MF-3) builds on the beloved Mini Flash series with the biggest update yet: Sony TTL is now supported alongside Olympus and OM System, a new

21700 battery delivers 2,000+ flashes and 90-minute LED runtime, and a dedicated macro TTL mode ensures precise exposures at close range. All existing Mini Flash accessories remain fully compatible.

The Octo 3500 brings 3,500 lumens of daylight-balanced (5000K, CRI 90) video light to action cameras and compact rigs. Its wide 100° beam, 70-minute runtime, and swappable 18650 batteries make it a powerful, fuss-free upgrade for videographers.

Completing the lineup, the OS-3 Optical Snoot finally brings precision snooting to the Hybrid Flash HF-1. Circular and oval aperture discs, a rotatable front barrel, and a colour filter slot give HF-1 shooters complete creative control — from nudibranch macro to wide-angle fish portraits.

[www.underwater.com.au](http://www.underwater.com.au)



# GEAR TEST EXTRA

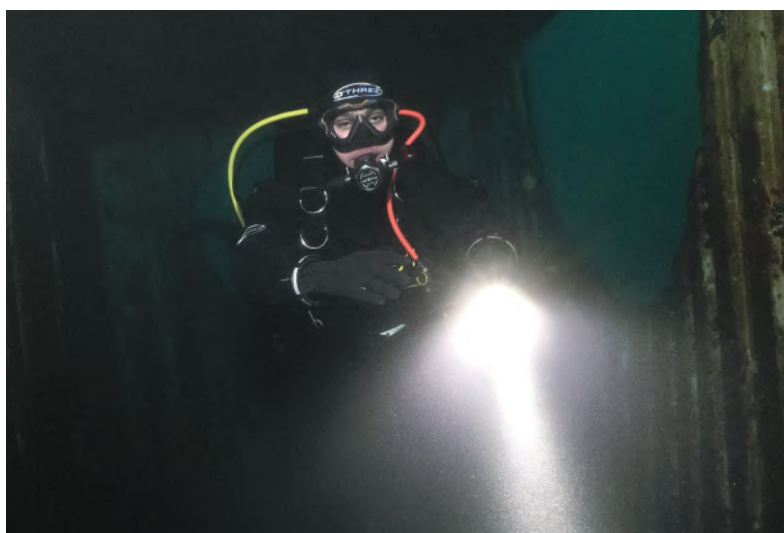
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## ORCATORCH ORCA 7 | SRP: \$199

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

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





was clear to see. Incredible performance for something so small. Even on the lower power setting it was still very bright. Don't get me wrong, it is never going to light up an area like a larger primary torch, such as OrcaTorch's ZD710 MK2, which has a wider beam, but for its size, it defies expectations. The Orca 7 also has an SOS function for emergencies. Despite its compact size, it is easy to operate even with drygloves on, and it sits nicely in a gloved hand. But this comes into its own as a dinky travel companion – it is lightweight, small enough to pop into a BCD or tech short

pocket, and would be ideal for looking into nooks and crannies for critters on your next foreign jaunt.

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

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



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e: [info@oceandivers.com.au](mailto:info@oceandivers.com.au)

a: 223a East Boundary Road, Bentleigh East

Ocean Divers is a PADI Five Star IDC and a Scubapro Platinum Dealer.

[www.oceandivers.com.au](http://www.oceandivers.com.au)

#### SCUBA CULTURE PTY LTD

t: 03 9808 0033

e: [info@scubaculture.com.au](mailto:info@scubaculture.com.au)

a: 117 Highbury Road, Burwood, Victoria 3125

Full service dive shop providing equipment sales, service, hire, training, dive club, dive travel and air/nitrox fills.

[www.scubaculture.com.au](http://www.scubaculture.com.au)

## NEW ZEALAND

### AUCKLAND

#### AQUATECH

t: +64 2156 3563

e: [servicing1@yahoo.com](mailto:servicing1@yahoo.com)

a: 4 WOULDDBANK Way, Welcome Bay

Aquatech is a scuba service centre. We service scuba regulators / full face masks / oxygen regulators. Underwater Scooters.

[www.aquatech.kiwi.nz](http://www.aquatech.kiwi.nz)

#### DIVE DOCTOR

t: +09 530 8117

e: [info@divedoctor.co.nz](mailto:info@divedoctor.co.nz)

a: 20R Sylvia Park Rd, Mt Wellington.

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t: +64 9478 2814

e: [info@aucklandscuba.co.nz](mailto:info@aucklandscuba.co.nz)

a: 49B Arrenway Drive, Auckland

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[www.aucklandscuba.co.nz](http://www.aucklandscuba.co.nz)

## NEW ZEALAND

### CANTERBURY

#### DAVES DIVING KAIKOURA

t: +64 21 0260 2316

e: [info@davesdivingkaikoura.com](mailto:info@davesdivingkaikoura.com)

a: 38 West End, Kaikoura 7300

Our goal is to provide people the experience of Kaikoura's underwater world.

[davesdivingkaikoura.com](http://davesdivingkaikoura.com)

### NORTHLAND

#### AOTEAROA DIVE

t: +61 7 2161 440

e: [dive@aotearoadive.co.nz](mailto:dive@aotearoadive.co.nz)

a: 1122 Eruera St, Rotorua 3010, Bay Of Plenty, New Zealand, Aotearoa

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[www.aotearoadive.co.nz](http://www.aotearoadive.co.nz)

#### DIVE NOW

t: (09) 438 1075

e: [info@divenow.co.nz](mailto:info@divenow.co.nz)

a: 41 Clyde Street, Whangarei, 0110, NZ

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[www.divenow.co.nz](http://www.divenow.co.nz)

#### PAIHIA DIVE

t: +64 9402 7551

e: [info@divenz.com](mailto:info@divenz.com)

a: 7 Williams Rd, Paihia 0247, NZ

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t: 09 9889508

e: [subaquadivenz@outlook.com](mailto:subaquadivenz@outlook.com)

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#### DIVE ZONE TAURANGA

t: 07 578 4050

e: [info@divezonetauranga.co.nz](mailto:info@divezonetauranga.co.nz)

a: 50 Cross Rd, Sulphur Point, Tauranga

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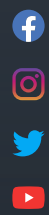
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