



EGYPT: STRAIT OF GUBAL
LAWSON WOOD SHOWCASES
THE HISTORY AROUND THE
STEAMSHIP KINGSTON

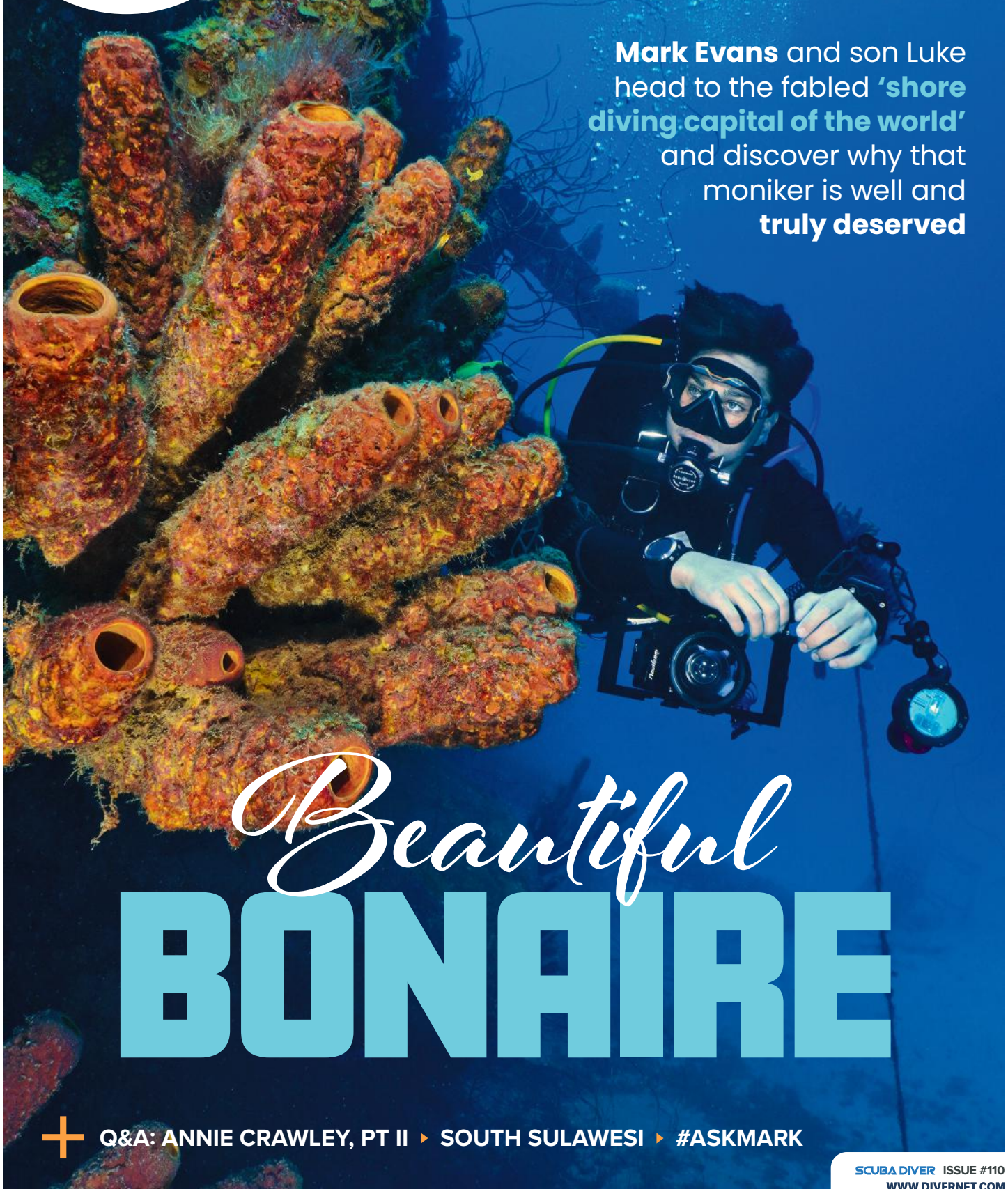
PADI RESCUE DIVER
LUKE EVANS NOTCHES UP
ANOTHER QUALIFICATION
IN SUNNY MALTA

TECH: ANDREA DORIA
MIKE DUDAS TAKES A CLOSER
LOOK AT THE LEGEND BUILT
AROUND THIS ICONIC WRECK

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TEST EXTRA: MARES PLANET 88X TBP REVIEWED

Mark Evans and son **Luke** head to the fabled **'shore diving capital of the world'** and discover why that moniker is well and **truly deserved**



Beautiful BONAIRE

+ Q&A: ANNIE CRAWLEY, PT II ▶ SOUTH SULAWESI ▶ #ASKMARK

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.

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September 2026

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Workshops

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Speakers

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EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Mark Evans
Tel: 0800 0 69 81 40 ext 700
Email: mark@rorkmedia.com

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Matt Griffiths
Email: matt@rorkmedia.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Lawson Wood, Annie Crawley, Talia Greis, Mike Dudas, Don Silcock

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

Ross Arnold
Tel: 0800 0 69 81 40 ext 701
Email: ross@rorkmedia.com

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

Penney Evans
Email: penney@rorkmedia.com

ACCOUNT DIRECTOR FOR TRAINING AGENCIES, EQUIPMENT AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Leo Grower
Email: leo@rorkmedia.com

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Diving freedom... and the next generation

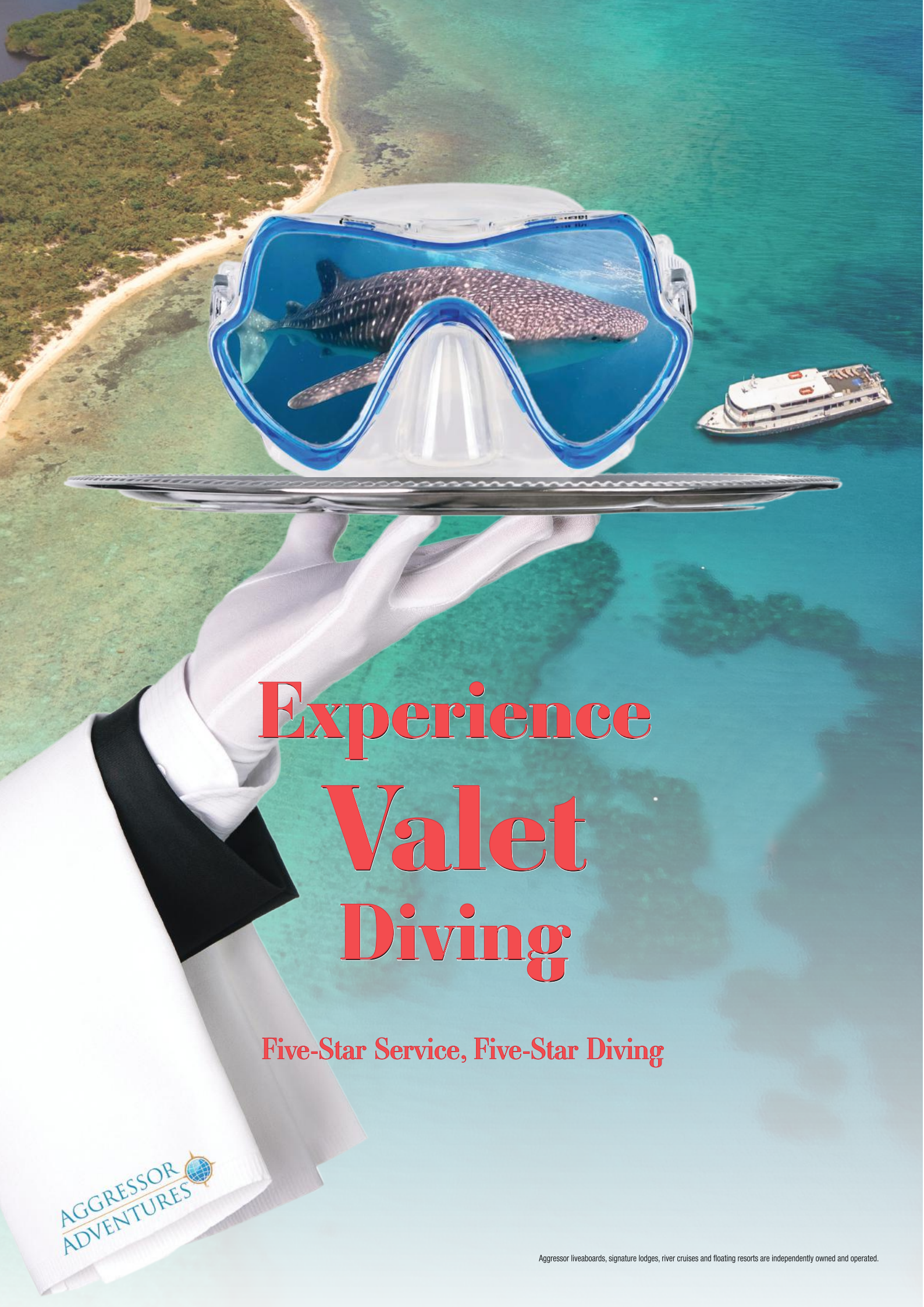
In May I had the pleasure of returning to one of my favourite Caribbean islands - Bonaire. This tiny speck of land just north of Venezuela is renowned as a 'diver's paradise' - and in fact it says so on all of the numberplates! - and because it has been a designated marine park for decades, the reefs and the inhabitants are thriving over some of its neighbouring islands.

One of the most appealing aspects of diving in Bonaire is the ability to just do your own thing. Most resorts offer drive-n-dive packages, which include accommodation and a rental pick-up truck. With more than 60 shore-diving locations spread along the sheltered west coast, you can explore at will, stopping and diving wherever you want, for however long you want.

The reefs are covered in sponge and coral growth, and myriad varieties of fish, but for those craving a bit of rust, there is a cracking shipwreck in the form of the Hilma Hooker, and the Salt Pier makes an awesome dive in its own right. It is a relatively short flight for Americans, who flock to the island in their droves, but don't let them have all the fun - it is easy to get to from Europe, you can just jump on a direct flight from Amsterdam.

My son Luke accompanied me for the week, and got some good practice with his new camera set-up. He'd recently completed his Rescue Diver, and I have now left him on Bonaire at Buddy Dive Resort, where he is in the midst of his Divemaster course, and will then be doing a six-week internship to put what he learned into practice in a real-world environment. Proud to see one of the next generation moving up the ranks... but it makes me feel old!

Mark Evans, Editorial Director



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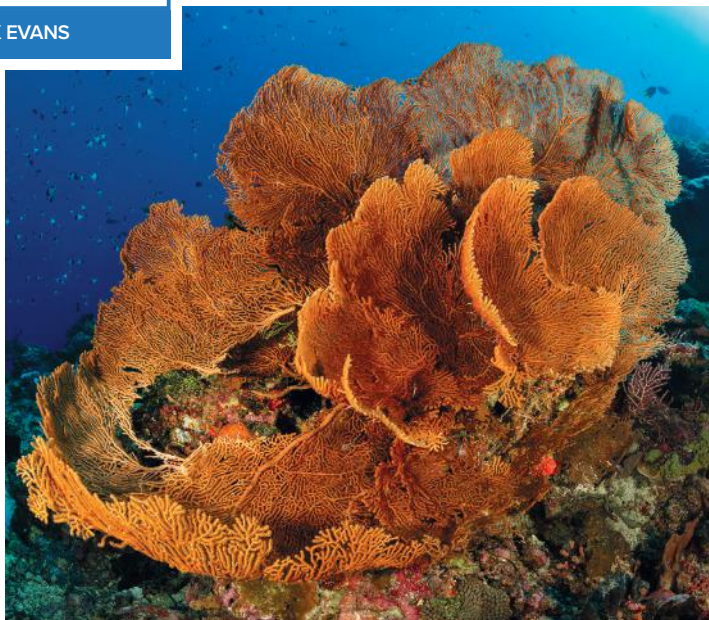
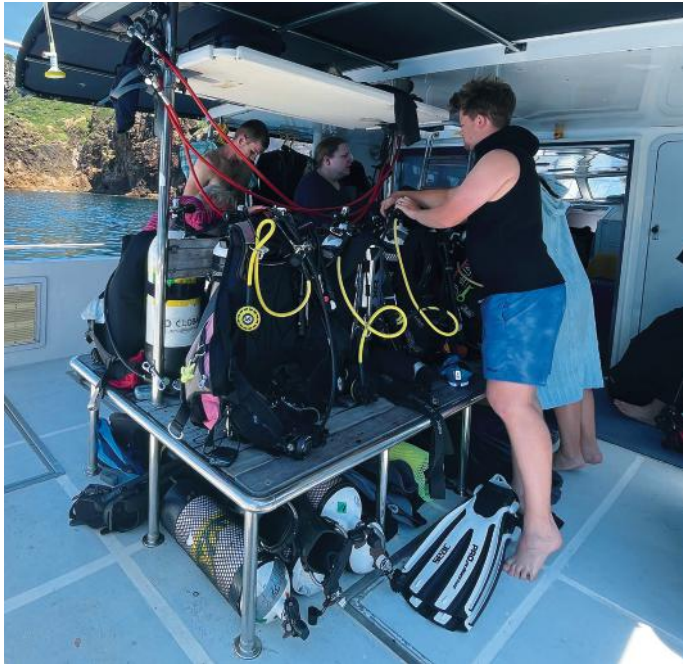
TEST EXTRA: MARES PLANET BBX TBP REVIEWED

Mark Evans and son Luke head to the famed 'shore diving capital of the world' and discover why that moniker is well and truly deserved

Beautiful
BONAIRE

+ Q&A: ANNIE CRAWLEY, PT II • SOUTH SULAWESI • #ASKMARK

PHOTOGRAPH © MARK EVANS



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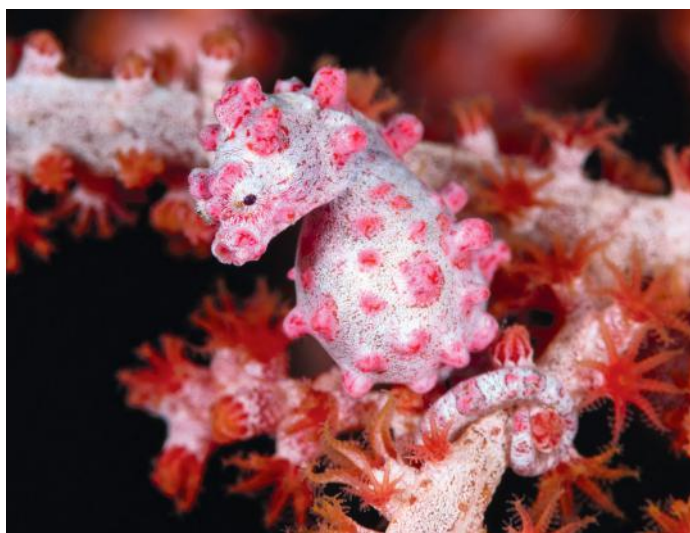
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Mark Evans rates and reviews the Mares Planet 88X regulator, and two products from Cressi’s 80th anniversary special-edition line-up - the Thor EBS fins, and Z2 mask.



"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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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
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WE'RE GONNA NEED A BIGGER BOAT..

North Wales is perhaps not the first place you'd think of when it comes to climbing aboard an amazingly accurate replica of the fishing boat from iconic movie Jaws, but thanks to one man's determination, Conwy Marina is now home to the world's only full-size Orca – Mark Evans had to check it out first-hand

The Orca II, as the vessel is known, started life as a Grand Banks fishing boat. It was built in Singapore in 1959 and sailed to California, then later in life it was moved overland to the east coast of the US, and from there it was sailed across the Atlantic to Brighton, which is where lifelong Jaws fan Jon Fieldhouse found it and brought it up to Conwy on the back of a truck.

Jon said: "I think I was nine years old when I went to see Jaws at the cinema. My parents wouldn't let me see it but the parents of my best friend snuck me in and, of course, I was traumatised! But from seeing Jaws II onwards, I wanted to get in the water and see sharks and do my bit to protect them – they are fabulous creatures."

Jon used to import lifesize replica dinosaurs from SE Asia and operate pop-up dinosaur experiences, and one day he got the construction team to make him a shark. This, combined with his lifelong fascination with Jaws, set him on his path to creating a faithful replica of the famous on-screen boat, or what he describes as 'the world's smallest theme park'.

The boatbuilder has devoted the last few years to hunting down and making items for the boat that would look as close as possible to 'the real thing'. This includes the bright yellow floatation barrels, the fishing chair fashioned from a Boston barber's chair, the shark cage, speargun, rifle, and other smaller, but equally important for die-hard fans, bits and pieces such as Pipit's dog collar, Brody's police badge, Quint's cap, Hooper's dive mask, Campbell's soup cans, a bottle of Old Spice, and a Penn Senator reel for the big-game rod.

Jon even imported Narragansett beer cans, which were hand-crushed in the movie by Capt Quint (Robert Shaw). But the item he is most proud of is the 1960s gas stove – he was looking for an authentic stove to put in the boat, and he believes that he has managed to get his hands on the actual prop from the movie itself. This is where Roy Schneider's character Chief Brody says the famed line 'we're gonna need a bigger boat'.

The attention to detail throughout the boat is astonishing – it really feels like you are stepping onto the movie set back





in 1975. There are so many little things to spot, and here and there he has added the odd still print from the film so you can see how close the Orca II is to the original.

He's also got some little extras on board which tie into the whole Jaws theme. There is a signed copy of Jaws by author Peter Benchley, and he also has a book about the sinking of the USS Indianapolis that has been signed by several survivors of that tragic incident – there is also a photograph of those ill-fated marines attached to the bridge. Jon decided to keep some of the character elements of the donor boat, and said he has done a sympathetic restoration to turn her into a homage of the Orca. He explained: "I've got a nice mixture of the two, the original boat and the boat from Jaws – it would be hard to tell the slight differences between the two".

He was resolute in his belief that people would travel to see the Orca II, but even he has been overwhelmed by the response so far. He has been inundated with requests for more information from as far afield as Japan, and has already had visitors from the USA who made the journey across to the UK specifically to visit the boat.

He has had people propose on the boat, and has even been asked if the Orca II can be used for a marriage ceremony.

He has been contacted by the team of a certain Tom Cruise, who is apparently keen to see the Orca II next time he is in the country, and he has been assured that director Steven Spielberg, star Richard Dreyfuss and Ian Shaw, son of Robert Shaw (and who recently played his father in stage show The Shark Is Broken) also want to visit the boat. The Orca II is moored at Conwy Marina in North Wales, and you can book a tour for four people for £95. This gives the group a whole hour on the boat, where they can take videos and photographs, recite all those famous lines, and much more. Jon has an insane knowledge of Jaws, and he makes the whole visit a memorable experience and a must for fans of the legendary movie.

A portion of ticket prices goes to several shark conservation charities, so you are doing your 'bit' for sharks too.

www.sharkboat.co.uk

UK FAILING WHALES AND DOLPHINS, SAYS THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS

Growing risks to whales, dolphins and porpoises in UK waters have been highlighted in a new report by the UK's The Wildlife Trusts organisation, which has outlined the most-important actions now required, particularly in their North Sea hotspots.

The UK government published its cetacean conservation strategy in late-2025 but the report asserts that clear targets or deadlines for action have yet to emerge. It argues that although swathes of UK seas might have been designated as protected, the legal safeguards are often too weak, poorly enforced or off the pace of emerging threats. The Wildlife Trusts, the UK's biggest marine-conservation NGO, says that the greatest threats to cetaceans, such as entanglement in fishing-gear and noise from human activities, are being tackled too slowly.

Fishing-gear causes hundreds of avoidable deaths each year, while shipping and offshore development noise continues to affect cetaceans' ability to feed, navigate and communicate, it states.

The NGO has outlined a five-point plan it wants to see the government adopt, beginning with improved enforcement and management of existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and protection of key feeding areas for whales, dolphins and porpoises.

It wants to see accidental bycatch in fishing-gear reduced by phasing out the most harmful nets and testing safer alternatives, and the setting of clear limits for underwater noise for both shipping and marine development. Finally, The Wildlife Trusts wants better monitoring of cetaceans by means of more surveys, better technology and citizen science.

The greater North Sea region supports at least eight marine-mammal species – most common sightings being of harbour porpoises, white-beaked dolphins and minke whales – with another seven species occasional visitors. Important feeding grounds such as the Dogger Bank and the waters off Flamborough Head on the east coast remain exposed to intensive fishing and development, says The Wildlife Trusts.

It is calling for temporary fishing restrictions during key seasons, adjustments to shipping routes and limits on noisy activities, and for the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to develop a national plan to reduce underwater noise and test safer, more selective fishing methods, including deterrent devices.

Increased surveys, better use of technology and stronger support for citizen science will also be critical to improving understanding and action, says The Wildlife Trusts.

BRITISH DIVERS FIND TRAGIC USCGC TAMPA DEEP OFF CORNWALL, UK

The sinking of the US Coast Guard Cutter Tampa, torpedoed in the Bristol Channel by the German U-boat UB-91, was the biggest US naval loss of life in combat during World War One. Now the wreck has been discovered at a depth of 94m by British technical-diving team the Gasperados.

USCGC Tampa sank weeks before the end of the war on 26 September 1918 with the deaths of all 131 onboard, consisting of 111 US Coast Guardsmen, 11 Royal Navy sailors, five British civilians and four US Navy personnel. The warship wreck was found some 80km out from Newquay in north Cornwall on Sunday, 26 April. "This discovery is the result of three years of research and exploration," said Gasperados team-leader Steve Mortimer.

"Tampa is of huge importance to the United States and the relatives of everyone who died that day. Their final resting place is known at last."

Mortimer, whose wife Barbara had led the archival research, said that the team was liaising with the US Coast Guard about the next steps to take, and would be making all of its video footage of the wreck available to the service.

"This was a real team effort," he said, thanking skipper Chris Lowe of Atlantic Diving for being 'fundamental to finding the wreck'. He also paid tribute to U-boat historian Michael Lowrey, the US Coast Guard including veteran Charles Meyer, and Atlantic historian Dr William Thiesen.

Miami to Tampa

The 58-metre USCGC Tampa was built in Newport News, Virginia as the Miami and launched in February 1912. She served as a patrol boat initially with the US Revenue Cutter Service, which later evolved into the Coast Guard, and was used off North America's eastern seaboard to locate hazardous icebergs and enforce navigation and fishing laws. The cutter was renamed Tampa in early 1916.

When the USA entered World War One in April 1917, Tampa came under US Navy control and was fitted with heavier armament, including a pair of 76mm guns, two machine-guns and depth-charge launchers. During her 11 months of war service she helped to protect 18 convoys from U-boats between Gibraltar and the south coast of England and further north, with only two casualties occurring among the escorted vessels in that time.



© The Gasperados



On the late afternoon of 26 September 1918, Tampa, under the command of Captain Charles Satterlee, left a convoy off North Cornwall to pick up coal in Milford Haven in Wales. At 7.30pm she was struck midships on the port side by a torpedo fired from UB-91. Over the next three days search and rescue vessels located only some wreckage and a single body. Two other bodies were later washed onto a Welsh beach. Chris Lowe told the *Jornish Times* that the team's research had started with the sinking position logged by UB-91, but the divers had found only a fishing-boat wreck there. Barbara Mortimer had scoured the archives to come up with ten potential marks. Following up on each of these the dive-team had found three fishing-boats, a tank landing craft, a cargo ship identified as the *Ingrid Frem*, a steel sailing ship and a very large steamship.

Final push

"We had basically given up, and Sunday was the final push," said Lowe. "It was an extremely long way offshore and conditions needed to be perfect to be able to find it."

Two divers returning to the surface had said independently that features had appeared familiar from historic images they had studied, and video footage supported their identification of the wreck as the Tampa. Nothing was removed from the site.

"The discovery is an extremely high achievement for us here in Cornwall," said Lowe, adding that the team had worked closely with the US government for the past three years and that the Coast Guard would be laying a wreath at the site. "It is one of the most-important wrecks we have off Cornwall, and for the Americans it is extremely important we have found it."

Until now only one item remained from the wreck of the USCGC Tampa – a bronze lifeboat placard that washed onto a Welsh beach in 1924 and is now held at the National Coast Guard Museum in Connecticut. The loss of the Tampa is commemorated by the USCG Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery and in a chapel at the Brookwood American Cemetery & Memorial in Surrey, UK.

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EMPEROR MALDIVES LOST TO FIRE IN MALDIVES

The Maldives liveaboard Emperor Explorer was lost following a fire on 9 May, according to its operator Emperor Group. All guests and crew were evacuated and transferred to the Emperor Serenity, a slightly smaller liveaboard in the fleet, and no injuries had been reported, said the operator.

“Our priority is the safety and well-being of everyone on board, and we are profoundly grateful that all guests and crew are safe and well,” said Emperor Group CEO Alexander Bryant at the time. “We are now focused on supporting our guests and crew.”

Emperor Explorer had been due to go out of service at the end of May. As reported on Divernet in April, the operator had only recently launched its successor, the Emperor Explorer II, as its flagship and at 44 metres its largest vessel in the Maldives, intending it to start work this August.

“The ship burned down and sank during the night,” said eyewitness Eliška Hofmannová on 10 May. She had recorded what was happening from the Princess Sara liveaboard, which had been anchored nearby. “I’m very glad everyone is safe.”

No cause for the fire or details of the evacuation have been released yet. The fire has been reported as occurring



near the Fish Factory dive-site near the Maldives’ capital Malé and spreading quickly enough to cause at least some of those on board to escape by jumping over the side of the boat. Built in 2019, the 42-metre Explorer carried up to 26 guests and had been running seven-night Best Of Maldives itineraries. The boat usually carried up to 14 crew, with four dive-guides and three dedicated dhoni crew.

An official enquiry into the incident can be expected to follow. Marine losses are usually investigated by the Maldives National Defence Force Coast Guard, the country’s maritime enforcement and rescue authority.

AGGRESSOR ADVENTURES ANNOUNCES THE RETURN OF DEMO WEEKS WITH MARES

Aggressor Adventures has announced the return of its very popular Demo Weeks, kicking off with a special Mares Demo Week aboard the Bahamas Aggressor II from 23-30 January 2027.

This unique seven-night experience gives scuba divers the opportunity to test the latest innovations in dive equipment while enjoying world-class diving in the Bahamas. Guests will have access to a full range of Mares gear, including BCDs, regulators, dive computers, masks, and fins – all available to demo throughout the week.

Mares became the exclusive supplier and brand of diving equipment for Aggressor Adventures in 2024, making this collaboration a natural extension of the partnership.

“We are very excited to bring back the Demo Weeks. These charters are a great way for our guests to experience the latest in dive technology firsthand,” said Cole Watkins, Director of Marketing and Advertising for Aggressor Adventures. “Partnering with Mares allows us to combine top-tier equipment with one of the most iconic dive destinations in the world.”

Joining the charter will be Megan Ehrenberg, North American HEAD Watersports Marketing Manager, and Pamela Mycroft, Southwest District Sales Manager, who will be onboard to share insights into the research, development, and engineering behind the company’s newest products. Guests can also look forward to



presentations, hand’s-on demonstrations, and opportunities to learn directly from the experts.

In addition to exceptional diving and gear testing, the week will include daily giveaways and a fun, interactive atmosphere designed to enhance the overall experience.

Set against the backdrop of the Bahamas’ renowned clear waters and vibrant marine life, Mares Demo Week offers a perfect combination of exploration, education, and excitement. Space is limited for this special event, and early booking is encouraged.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

SAT-IMAGE TECHNIQUE EXPOSES 1,000 'INVISIBLE' CORAL REEFS



More than 1,000 previously uncharted coral reefs have been discovered and mapped in northern Australia by a team of Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) researchers – without them having to leave their offices.

Until now little of the northern Australian coastline had been surveyed, and maritime charts failed to distinguish between coral and rocky reefs because they had been devised only to warn vessels of obstructions. The coral reefs have turned out to be habitats for a wide range of marine life. Some might have been known to local people, but they were typically hidden in sediment-rich waters – and none had been considered in terms of conservation and development planning.

The reefs were unveiled by the Marine & Coastal Hub Project, led by AIMS and run in partnership with the University of Queensland (UQ). Project leader Dr Eric Lawrey, who is AIMS' eAtlas Project manager, says that it was the launch of Google Earth that gave him the idea some 12 years ago. When he used the online tool to scrutinise the northern Australian coastline, he noticed what he thought might be coral reefs but that had never appeared on a map.

"If you look at any one satellite image the water just looks like turquoise paint and you can't really see reefs," he says. "But if we overlay 200 images of the area taken at different times to create a composite image, all the swirly patterns of the moving water move around and average out, while the reefs are constant. "Their signal gets reinforced and they become much clearer. It allows us to peek deeper into the water column than we could in one image, and that's pretty much the process we used. Once we could see the reefs, we could map them."

It took 700 hours to digitise and classify the reefs manually, after automated techniques had been found to yield too many false positives. The work revealed that northern Australia had a similar quantity of individual reefs to the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), though many of them were much smaller.

The core study area stretched from the Abrolhos Islands in Western Australia to Queensland's Cape York and exposed more than 3,600 coral and 2,900 rocky reefs. Meanwhile a separate UQ project using the same new satellite imagery technique was remapping the outer GBR reefs, enabling hundreds of additional reefs to be identified and false reefs to be removed. The GBR Marine Park Authority is reviewing these findings.

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Bipolar Disorder and Diving

Q: I am a dive instructor but have not dived for five years. I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Can I dive safely with the medicine I take, or will it be dangerous even if I dive in shallow water?

A: Generally speaking, both bipolar I and bipolar II disorders are considered relative contraindications to diving, meaning that people who have this disorder need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis for their fitness to dive. Many divers have found ways to manage their condition and enjoy diving, but each person should discuss the possible implications of diving with their physicians. DAN medics are available to consult with your health care providers.

Some severe symptoms of bipolar disorder may be a contraindication to diving, and we recommend avoiding diving while in either a manic or depressive state. Manic episodes bring the potential for bad decision-making and engaging in risky behaviours. Depressive episodes can cloud our judgement and produce circumstances that may leave us prone to accident or injury.

There has been little research into the effects of barometric pressure on specific medications. In general, we are most concerned about the underlying conditions that the drugs are treating and the potential side effects of those drugs. Lithium is a common medication used to treat these disorders, but its use comes with significant concerns. Lithium can become toxic if a person is dehydrated or if sodium levels drop. Diving is a diuretic, which can complicate the situation.

The side effects of some drugs can alter a person's mental capacity or make them drowsy, neither of which is compatible with diving. Some medication side effects — such as fatigue, dizziness, anxiety, blurred vision, and headaches — can mimic symptoms of decompression sickness (DCS) and complicate a DCS diagnosis.

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Beautiful BONAIRE

Mark Evans is always wary when somewhere is labelled the 'capital of the world' for something, but with Bonaire, that moniker is well and truly deserved when it comes to shore diving, as he found when he headed to the 'home of diving freedom' with son Luke in tow

Photographs by Mark and Luke Evans



When an island has 'Diver's Paradise' on the bottom of all of its numberplates, it gives you a clear indication of just how vital scuba diving is to the country's economy and very identity. Bonaire was quick to realise what it had in the waters surrounding this tiny speck of land in the western Caribbean, just north of the coast of Venezuela, and the Bonaire National Marine Park was set up way back in 1979! This means that the reef is in great shape compared with some of the other islands in the vicinity, with permanent moorings and a ban on using anchors helping to protect the colourful corals and sponges.

While the dive centres on the island offer boat diving, it is the lure of shore diving and 'doing your own thing' that draws many of the dive tourists, with most resorts offering drive-n-dive packages including pick-up trucks, and from talking to my fellow divers during my time on-island, it was amazing how many are multiple repeat visitors, with this factor being one of the main attractions. Several made annual pilgrimages, while others came two or more times every year. Given how easy it is to get to from North America, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the divers are from the USA.

The entire west coast of Bonaire is dotted with shore-diving sites, and finding them is a doddle. You just drive along the coast road and look for football-sized rocks painted bright yellow, with the dive site names written on them. Once at your chosen site, you simply park your pick-up, set up your gear, and head into the water. There are additional yellow-painted stones marking the designated entry/exit points at most sites, to further limit unnecessary damage to the coral reef. Entry and exit for nearly all of the sites is over dead and broken coral, so sturdy boots are a must, and just be aware that some locations are easier to get in and out of than others, so watch your footing and take your time.

The beauty of this set up is that you can head out with the intention of diving a specific ►



Our trusty rental pick-up truck



Luke getting some camera practice in at Salt Pier



Luke checking pressure and nitrox mix at the drive-thru gas station

site, then once you arrive, you find there are several other vehicles already there. You can then just trundle along to another, quieter dive site if you so wish, or park up alongside your fellow divers. Once in the water, you can dive for however long you want, in whatever direction you want, at whatever depth you want.

Most of the dives involve a short swim in 2-3m of water over a sandy plateau to get to the top of the sloping reef in 5-6m. Many of the sites slope off down to 35-40m at around a 45 degree angle, although to the south you encounter a double reef system, and the further north you go, the reef gets steeper until it is more a wall dropping into the depths once you reach the likes of dive site Karpata. The reefs boast large sponges, particularly tube, barrel, vase, stovepipe and elephant ear, as well as gently swaying fields of sea fans, sea plumes and sea rod, alongside elkhorn, staghorn, brain, pillar, fire and star corals.

This colourful landscape is home to myriad varieties of Caribbean reef species, such as angelfish, parrotfish, chromis, spiny lobster, sergeant majors, snapper, grouper, goatfish, lizardfish and boxfish, as well as larger species like jacks, barracuda, eagle rays, stingrays,

impressive tarpon and turtles, plus the odd reef, blacktip or nurse shark if you are lucky. I was on Bonaire with my son Luke (he was staying on-island as I headed home after a week to do his PADI Divemaster, followed by a six-week

internship – watch this space for future articles about his experiences of ‘going pro’), and staying at the long-established Buddy Dive Resort.

Buddy has the whole Bonaire diving scene nailed – we were staying in one of their well-appointed one-bedroom suites, which boasted a decent-sized kitchen for those who want to go the self-catering route; had one of their fleet of well-maintained pick-up trucks as transport (the new Renault Oroch compact pick-ups are ideal, complete with wooden tank racks in the flatbed); and had been given a locker in the dive centre for our gear, which could be accessed at any time.

At Buddy’s dive centre, there are banks of cylinders – air and nitrox (usually 32-33%) – there for the taking for diving on Buddy’s House Reef. You

just grab a tank, check the contents, both for pressure and the mix if using nitrox using the handy spring-loaded gauge/ analyser, and then set up your gear. There are steps into the water, and this reef is a stunning dive in its own right, with

“ This trip was his first time to get the new system in the water, and Bonaire is the ideal place for photographers of all levels, as there is so much marine life whether you are shooting macro or wide-angle ”



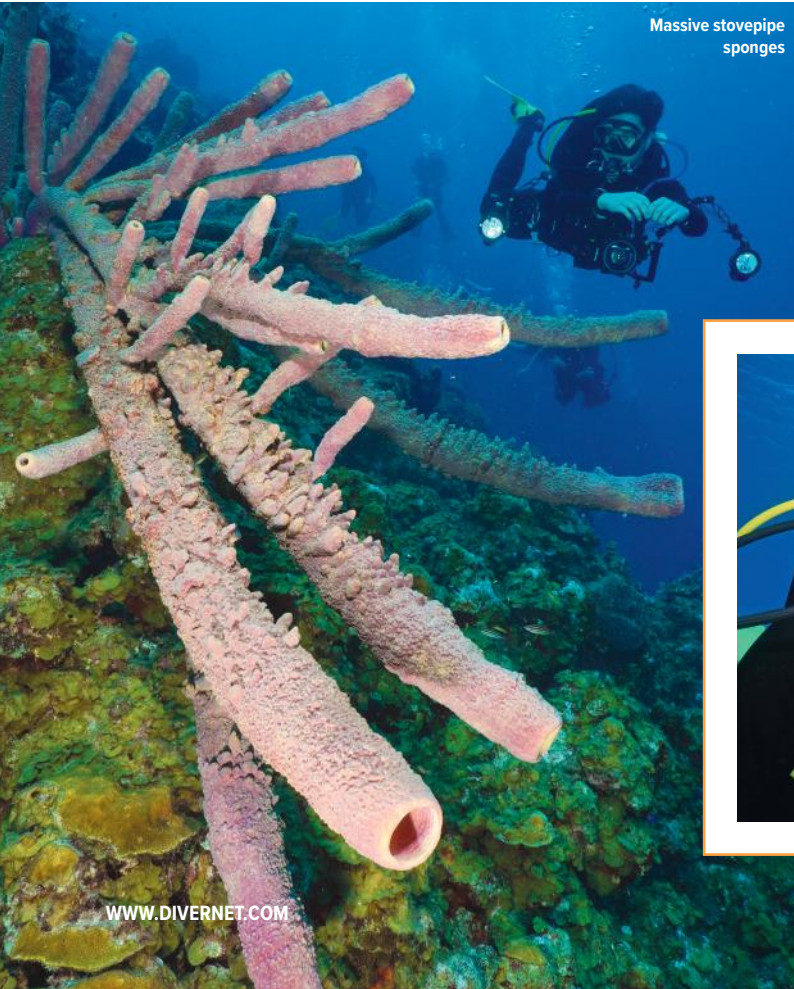
Luke with a huge elephant ear sponge



Luke checking out the salt deposits



Scorpionfish

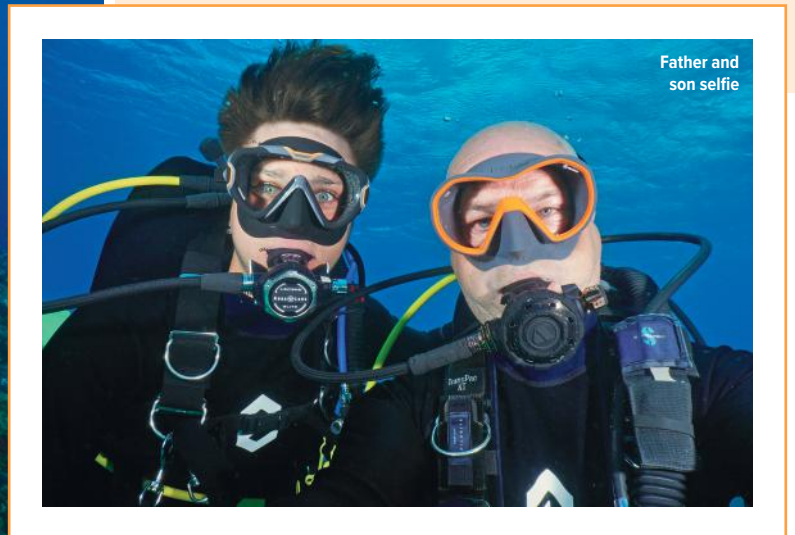


Massive stovpipe sponges

prolific coral and sponge growth in all directions. There are several rinse tanks, with dedicated camera buckets, and the two docks are where Buddy's fleet of boats dock to pick up and drop off divers.

If you are heading out to other shore-diving sites, you can go through their nifty dual-lane drive-thru gas station, where you can pull up, grab some full cylinders of nitrox or air, check the contents/pressure, dump any empty ones, and get on your way again with the minimum of fuss. There are several rinse tanks here as well, so at the end of a day you can drop off your used cylinders, rinse your kit, and then stash it in your locker (there are also racks of lockers at the drive-thru).

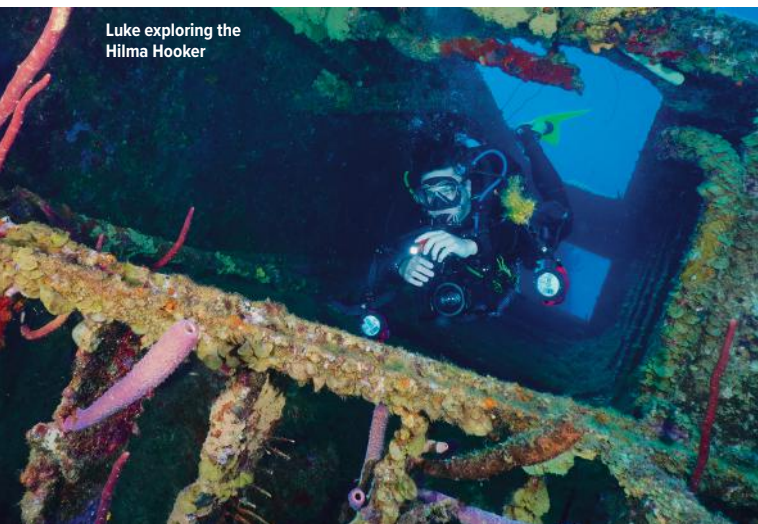
Dive sites of particular note – and bearing in mind there are more than 60 shore-diving sites off Bonaire itself and another 26 boat dive sites off Klein Bonaire, so you have plenty to choose from! – include the 72-metre cargo vessel Hilma Hooker, which is home to large tarpon and is well covered in corals and sponges; Salt Pier, which has pilings smothered in marine growth but can only be dived when no cargo vessel is docked; Oil Slick Leap, where entering the water involves a giant stride from a height of several metres off the rocky shore; 1,000 Steps, where the actual 64 steps can feel more like a 1,000 at the end of a long dive; the aforementioned Karpata, which boasts a true vertical wall dropping into the depths and has an ancient anchor embedded in the coral; and Playa Frans, where you have to negotiate a rough dirt track for a few kilometres to get to the entry/exit point. ▶



Father and son selfie



Snapper shoal under Salt Pier



Luke exploring the Hilma Hooker

I moved on from my trusty Sony NEX-5 mirrorless camera in an Aquatica housing a couple of years ago to a Sony A6600 in a Nauticam housing, but I had kept my original system, with an eye to passing it on to Luke for his first set-up. But as the housing had started to leak, we found a second-hand Nauticam housing and Sony NEX-5n camera, which used all our existing lenses, and could be paired up with the arms and Inon D2000 strobes we already had.

This trip was his first time to get the new system in the water, and Bonaire is the ideal place for photographers of all levels, as there is so much marine life whether you are shooting macro or wide-angle. He was soon getting to grips with his rig, and is looking forward to honing his skills over the next couple of months.

Now photographers and experienced divers will be in their element, but this whole diving freedom lark is not just for the veterans. Perhaps you don't feel that confident in your navigation if you are still a relative novice, but I have to say, Bonaire is the perfect place to build up your confidence. Most dives, you get in and then head off with the reef on your left or right shoulder, and then at half a tank, you just turn around and put the reef on the opposite shoulder and swim back to your entry point. Simple.

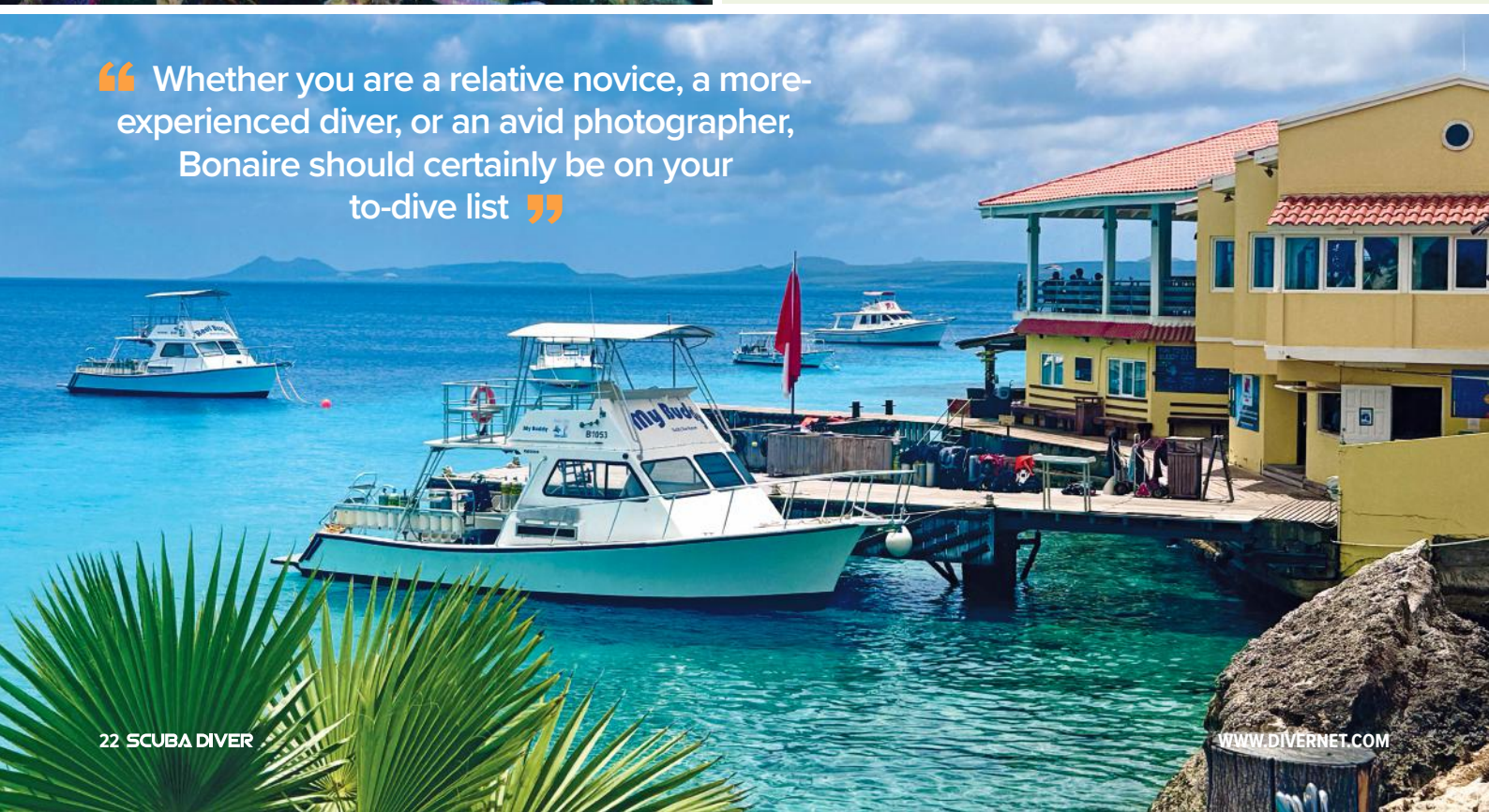
Go by boat

If you just don't want to go your own way, or just want to chill out on a boat with all your diving buddies, never fear, Buddy Dive Resort has got you covered on that front too. They run a fleet of five dive boats that can offer two-tank dive trips, single-tank jaunts and even night dives.

The 26 dive sites around Klein Bonaire are also very pretty, and they can only be accessed via boat, so it is worth scheduling a day or two of boat diving into your holiday to experience this picturesque little island that lies a short distance from the main island. Most of the shore-diving sites on Bonaire itself can also be done via boat if you so wish.

On boat dives, a staff member gives a thorough briefing of the dive site, and then leads the divers along the reef, pointing out any interesting critters along the way. ▶

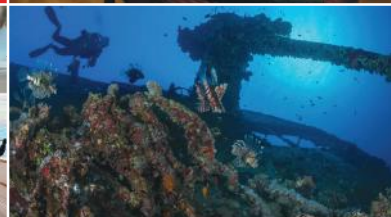
“ Whether you are a relative novice, a more-experienced diver, or an avid photographer, Bonaire should certainly be on your to-dive list ”



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A friendly welcome from the front-of-house team



Martien diving with Robbert van Vonno

Buddy Dive Resort

Buddy Dive Resort has been in existence for over 45 years, and in that time has grown from a small apartment complex into a sprawling property of one-, two- and three-bedroomed accommodation options, with two swimming pools, two restaurants – Blennies, and the a la carte Ingridients – as well as the dive centre, classrooms, drive-thru gas station and plenty of car parking.

Originally opening in 1980 with 46 apartments, 20 rental trucks and three boats, it was purchased by Martien and Ingrid van der Valk in 2002, and has expanded year on year since then. In 2004, the adjacent Lions Dive Hotel was acquired, increasing capacity by over 30 apartments, in 2007 Buddy Dive Tek was launched to provide technical diving support and training, and in 2012, the Reef Renewal Foundation Bonaire was established to protect local coral reefs. Buddy Dive Resort now has over 70 apartments, six dive boats, and more than 100 vehicles in its rental fleet, and is a respected PADI five-star IDC centre.

Martien and Ingrid’s daughters Michelle, Barbara and Steffie and their husbands head up the Buddy team now, and while I was on-island, Barbara’s young son Martien Zandstra experienced his first dives at age ten with instructor Robbert van Vonno – it was nice to see Martien Senior there to see his grandson venturing beneath the surface, the next generation of the Buddy Dive family.

www.buddydive.com



French angelfish

I personally much prefer doing my own thing when I am diving, but the Buddy Dive team are very relaxed and you never feel hurried or under the cosh with any of their dive guides/instructors, plus, they can often be the best when it comes to finding elusive critters.

At Forest on Klein Bonaire, our dive guide Olivia found a vivid-yellow frogfish nestled in a coral head on the way out, and on the way back, virtually under the boat, she spotted a seahorse. You can’t miss the dive team in their bright-orange rash guards, so keep an eye on them for when they are pointing out any marine life.

In summary

Bonaire is undoubtedly the ‘shore diving capital of the world’, as I don’t know of any other location which is so well set up for diving along the shoreline. I love just being able to

chunk some tanks in the back of a pick-up and then head off for the morning and seeing where I end up. Bonaire is not a big island – it is some 35-40km long, and 5-11km wide – so nowhere is particularly far to drive, and we often went out, did a couple of dives in the south of the island, came back to the resort for lunch and to rinse kit/sort new cylinders, and then headed off to some of the northern sites. Some of the roads are little more than dirt tracks, especially if you head off to the likes of Nukove and Playa Frans, but the trucks are more than up to the task.

Whether you are a relative novice, a more-experienced diver, or an avid photographer, Bonaire should certainly be on your to-dive list. From the UK it is easy to get to – a hopper flight from a regional airport to Schiphol in Amsterdam, and then a direct flight to Bonaire (sometimes with a brief stopover in Aruba). ■



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SCUBA DIVER Q&A

ANNIE CRAWLEY PT II

We chat to acclaimed film-maker, underwater photographer, author and ocean educator about her enduring love affair with the sea, and her mission to protect our blue planet for future generations.

Photographs courtesy of Annie Crawley



Manta rays



Sealions at Hornby Island

Q: You have written several books, including many aimed at younger audiences – how important is it to get children involved with our underwater world? Perhaps that is a question best asked to ‘Ocean Annie’, as you are known by thousands of kids.

A: Getting children involved in our underwater world is not just important - it's essential.

‘Ocean Annie’ was a name that stuck given to me back in 2006 during one of my first presentations in the Chicago Public Schools. I was on an author tour after publishing *Ocean Life A to Z* with Reader's Digest Children's Division, supported in part by the Save Our Seas Foundation. That experience changed everything for me. I realized that when you bring the real ocean into a classroom, you're not just teaching facts - you're opening a door to connection, curiosity, and care.

My goal has always been to share the ocean with the next generation because understanding leads to love and respect, and this leads to protection. Through my work and research, one truth stands above all: every breath we take connects us to the sea. The ocean produces more than half of the oxygen in every breath through phytoplankton, algae, kelp and marine plants. It regulates our climate, drives weather patterns, and supports nearly three billion people who rely on it as their primary source of protein. A healthy global economy is tied directly to a healthy ocean.

We teach children the names of trees and land animals, but rarely introduce them to the systems in the ocean that sustain life on this planet. We plant forests, but overlook kelp forests, eelgrass meadows, and phytoplankton - quietly doing the work that allows us to exist.



Annie striking a pose



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Tiger shark cruising in the shallows



A pair of harlequin shrimp

What we don't understand, we tend to fear. And what we fear, we distance ourselves from. That distance has consequences. Not just environmentally, but in how we relate to the natural world and to ourselves. Water is one of the most-powerful sources of regulation, creativity, and connection available to us, yet many children grow up without a meaningful relationship to it.

The ocean does not recognize the boundaries we draw on maps. Whales, sharks, orcas and so many animals move freely across them. Water connects everything - our rivers, lakes, rain, and watersheds all tie back to the sea. The ocean's story is our story.

When children understand that connection early in life, everything shifts. They don't see the ocean as something far away or separate - they see it as part of who they are. And when that happens, protection becomes personal.

That's the heart of 'Ocean Annie'. It's not just a name. It's an invitation - for children to explore, to understand, and ultimately, to become stewards of the world below the surface. During the pandemic, everything we created went online for free for families and schools.

The future of our ocean depends on what children learn to love today. When we give the gift of the real ocean to children, we change our future.

Q: You have travelled extensively – where are some of your favourite diving destinations you have visited?

A: It's always hard to choose favourite diving destinations because, for me, it's less about the place and more about the experience. I'm drawn to behaviour - those rare, intimate moments in the natural world that reveal how life beneath the surface truly works. ▶



Annie photographing a baby humpback whale
© Steve Woods



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Verde Island,
Philippines



“ So while I've been fortunate to dive in places around the world like Mexico and the Arctic, my favourite 'destination' is really any place where I can witness and share the extraordinary behaviours of life beneath the surface ”

That said, the Coral Triangle holds a very special place in my heart when it comes to coral reefs. It's one of the most-biodiverse regions on the planet, and I've been fortunate to spend years there, particularly living in Indonesia and working extensively in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. There is an energy in that part of the world - an abundance of life - that is both humbling and inspiring.

When I moved to California, I fell in love with a completely different kind of ecosystem in the Channel Islands. The kelp forests there are magical - towering, dynamic, and full of life in a way that feels otherworldly. That appreciation for temperate water diving deepened when I settled in the Pacific Northwest. As a drysuit diver, I've come to love the Salish Sea and everything it offers, from its biodiversity to its seasonal rhythms.

More recently, my work has taken me into the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor, which includes Costa Rica, Ecuador, Colombia, and Panama. It's an important migration corridor for marine life on our planet, and even though I've only explored a small part, it continues to call me back.

And then there are the moments that transcend location entirely - discovering frogfish mating behaviours; witnessing

a river of moray eels hunting in groups with snapper, jacks, leather bass and more; swimming alongside a mother humpback whale and her calf; or filming silky shark migrations. These are the experiences that stay with me and continue to shape my work as a storyteller.

So while I've been fortunate to dive in places around the world like Mexico and the Arctic, my favourite 'destination' is really any place where I can witness and share the extraordinary behaviours of life beneath the surface.

Q: What is your most-memorable diving experience?

A: Witnessing the silky shark migration at Malpelo Island, Colombia in 2021. It begins above the surface. You watch the water carefully, looking for signs. In this case, it's the movement of the birds - especially the Nazca booby birds. They dive at incredible speeds, hitting the water with precision, then rest on the surface before lifting off again. That behaviour is a signal. It tells you something is happening below. Often, it means a bait ball has formed, with tuna and silky sharks working together to push it toward the surface.

Approaching slowly in the zodiac, everything becomes intentional. You don't rush in. You read the water, position ▶



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yourself, and enter from the edge rather than the centre. Then you slip beneath the surface. And suddenly, you're surrounded. Hundreds of silky sharks moving together with purpose, as if travelling along an invisible superhighway. There's a rhythm to it, a flow. They are not chaotic or aggressive - they are coordinated, aware, and completely in their element.

Moments like that are hard to put into words. It's not just what you see, but what you feel - being immersed in something so much larger than yourself, witnessing a natural phenomenon that has existed long before us and hopefully continues despite us. It's those experiences that stay with me and remind me why it's so important to keep sharks swimming in our ocean.

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

A: Some of my most-difficult diving memories are not a single moment, but a pattern I've witnessed over time.

Seeing widespread coral bleaching in places like the Maldives and Papua New Guinea is heartbreaking. Reefs that were once vibrant and full of life have turned pale and quiet. You can feel the absence. It's not just a visual change - it's a loss of an entire living system. I've also dived through areas where the ocean is filled with trash. Witnessing declines in real time hurts. Overfishing is the greatest threat facing our ocean. Returning to locations that were once remote and pristine, only to find them impacted by rapid, unsustainable development and inadequate waste management, is incredibly difficult to witness.

These are the visible signs of human-driven climate change and environmental pressure on the ocean. For those of us who spend time beneath the surface, it's not abstract - it's something we see, feel, and carry with us.

When I first began this work, my focus was on the ocean itself - sharing its beauty, its mystery, and its importance. Over time, that perspective has expanded. This work is



Ball of sardines

just as much about humanity as it is about the ocean. Because while the ocean has the capacity to recover over long timescales, we do not. Our survival is directly tied to the health of the ocean. And despite everything, I remain hopeful. We already have many of the solutions needed to address these challenges. What we need now is understanding - an awareness of how deeply interconnected we are with the ocean's systems. When people truly understand that connection, it changes how we act. That's where the work continues.

Q: What does the future holds for Annie Crawley?

A: The future holds more diving, more storytelling, and a continued commitment to connection and impact.

I plan to keep diving as much as possible, because that is where everything begins for me - experience, understanding, and inspiration. From there, I'll continue writing, both articles and books, to share those lessons in ways that reach people beyond the water.

Multi-media storytelling will play an even bigger role. Through film, presentations, and collaborations, I want to create experiences that inspire people to see the ocean differently and understand their connection to it. Storytelling has the power to shift perspective, and with that shift comes the potential for real change.

I'm also deeply committed to elevating the work of other women in this field and creating opportunities for the next generation. There are so many important voices and stories that deserve to be seen and heard, and I want to continue helping bring these forward. At the heart of it all is the belief that storytelling can create impact - by inspiring awareness, connection, and action. And, of course, more diving. I'm just following the signs of my underwater life. ■



Black-tip reef sharks

mares



Force-X Mask Family

An underwater photograph of a diver exploring a rocky reef. The diver is positioned in the center-right, swimming towards the left. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through from the top. Several fish are visible, including a large dark fish in the foreground and a school of smaller fish in the background. The rocky terrain is covered in coral and other marine life.

THE POOR KNIGHTS

Talia Greis heads to New Zealand lured by the promise of world-class diving, and is not left disappointed

Photographs by Talia Greis

“ Exploring the Poor Knights holds a special place in my heart forever, and has given me a new-found respect for temperate diving. I would love to see more people discover one of the world’s most-overlooked dive regions ”

When adventure travellers visit New Zealand, they're often drawn by the thrill of breathtaking landscapes, the allure of its renowned great walks, and the chance to unwind with a relaxing escape through wine country. And although I successfully aspired to tick off all of those things, it was the ultimately the whispers of world-class diving that landed me there in the first place.

The North Island of New Zealand was supposedly where all the underwater action was, and I must admit, after exploring the coast of the North Island, I began to worry I'd sacrificed an undeniably beautiful trip to the tropics for temperate diving with minimal visibility. But it wasn't until I descended into the crystal-clear waters of The Poor Knights that I realised I had found a unique diving experience that would be hard to replicate anywhere else.

The Poor Knights Islands are located approximately one hour off the east coast of Whangaruru, a tiny remote town in the northern part of North Island. In an effort to get in as much diving as possible, I always find liveaboard diving is the way to go, and given the remote circumstances and lengthy travel time, I was over the moon to discover that there was one legendary boat charter that offered a three-day liveaboard – Northland Dive!

Did you know?

The Poor Knights islands, located 14 miles off the Tutukaka coast, are the remains of a group of ancient volcanoes. The formation of the islands boasts spectacular underwater drop-offs, walls, caves, tunnels and arches from 6m to 90m.

This family run dive centre was founded by dive veterans Shane and Julia, who have not only dedicated their lives to showcasing the beauty of New Zealand diving, but were also responsible for the scuttling of the HMNZS Canterbury wreck, which has now become a thriving artificial reef covered in vibrant jewel anemones in Deep Water Cove (another bucket list item I'd highly recommend). Their dive lodge was the perfect home away from home and a tranquil place to gear up, set up the camera rig, and kick back in the evenings with a book and a chilled glass of Savignon Blanc.

The following day we set off on their liveaboard Sun Spy. As we approached the Poor Knights Islands, I was instantly drawn to bubbling on the surface that resembled a pot of boiling water – it was the kind of fleeting spectacle that had me scramble for my gear, convinced it may disappear at any time. I later realised that The Poor Knights was all about 'fish', as this phenomenon persisted throughout our time there – above and below the surface.

As an underwater photographer I'm constantly trying to capture a moment in time that draws the viewers attention to the 'star' subject. But what I found interesting (and incredibly challenging) about photographing the Poor Knights is that you're forced to engage in a different sort of 'fish' photography, where the subject isn't a solitary creature but a vast, shifting mass of schooling fish as far as the eye can see. It sounds simple, but relearning how to see – treating fish as the main event rather than a supporting backdrop – was surprisingly difficult. What made the transition easier, though, was the environment itself. The Poor Knights Islands are the remnants of an ancient volcanic cone which result in towering underwater formations, dramatic swim-throughs, and dense kelp forests swaying in the surge like a slow, graceful underwater ballet. ▶

My favourite sites

Middle Arch – This was the first dive I did on my visit to the Islands and one that has left the deepest imprint on my memory. Middle Arch centres around a vast swim through the centre of the arch, which is peppered with huge clusters of schooling snapper, blue maomao, damselfish, and if you're lucky, an abundance of long and short-tailed stingrays flying in and out of the arch like flying carpets.

A very dramatic scene given the right conditions. Most people turn around at the end of the swim-through and finish their dive by visiting the bubble cave right next to the entrance, where you can actually surface inside and have a peep around the cave. However, my curiosity steered me off course and guided me all the way around the arch, where you really feel like you're at the mercy of the ocean, gazing into the deep hoping for a chance encounter with a large pelagic.

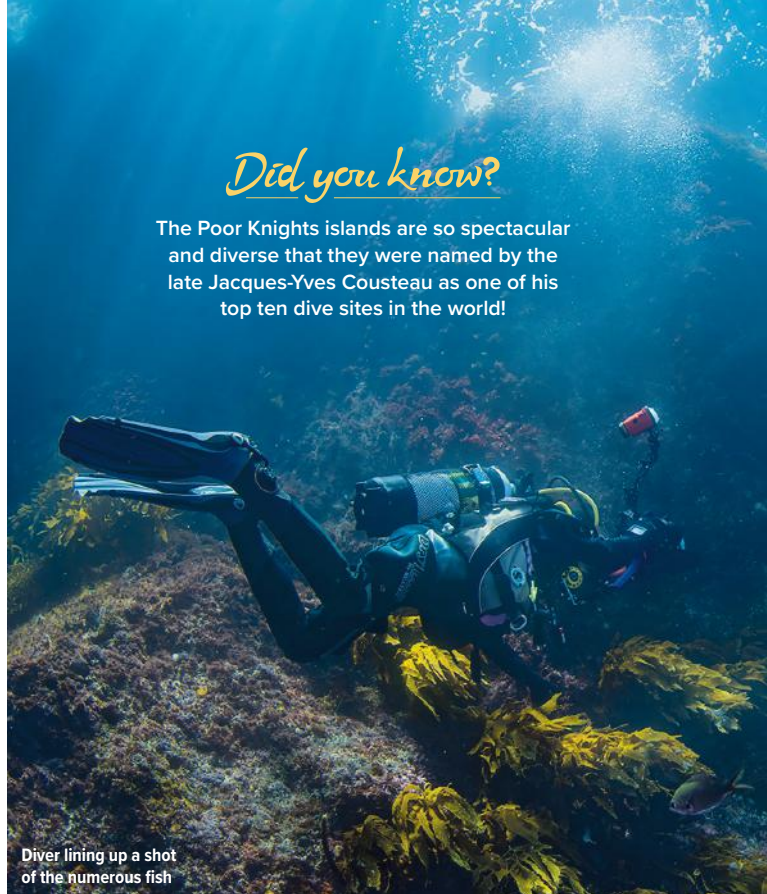
There had been whispers of interactions with dolphins, orcas, and mola mola, but I settled for a huge school of fast patrolling kingfish, whose presence sent the surrounding baitfish into a dazzling frenzy like underwater fireworks. When I managed to pull focus from the spectacle that was unfolding I also noticed an abundance of multicolour seaweeds, algae and macro life that covered the walls – nudibranchs, eels, scorpionfish and more.

North Arch – Without doubt my favourite site in the region and one that is often sidestepped due the potential of raging currents, a hazard which sadly hindered our passage through the arch itself. As the group commenced their dive, I spent a good portion of my time on the surface capturing the largest school of blue mao mao I had ever seen, which was further complimented by the dramatic towering structure of the arch. Split shots are a hard technique to master but even more difficult when you're being sucked into the arch every ten seconds with a terrifying force.

As time ticked on I finally decided to blow some bubbles and descended through the heavy cloud of bubbling fish, only to discover this dramatic archway soared into the depths as far as the eye could see, covered in flowing kelp, soft sponges and vibrant red algae. It was the perfect

Did you know?

The Poor Knights islands are so spectacular and diverse that they were named by the late Jacques-Yves Cousteau as one of his top ten dive sites in the world!



Diver lining up a shot of the numerous fish



Arch split shot

“ Without doubt my favourite site in the region and one that is often sidestepped due the potential of raging currents ”





stage to compliment the grandeur of schooling fish that soared through the current in numbers that felt truly beyond measure. I'd describe this dive as a sensory overload - caught between a sheer wall face and a spiralling vortex of fish that all appear to dissolve into the blue.

I felt a sense of unfinished business not being able to dive through the arch itself, where the 70-metre wall face is said to be teeming with life, fuelled by nutrient-rich currents that funnel through the passage - feeding the sponges that cloak the walls and sustaining dense schools of blue and pink maomao that fill the archway. There is also said to be sightings of schooling parrotfish, sharks, rays, and an abundance tiny macro critters.

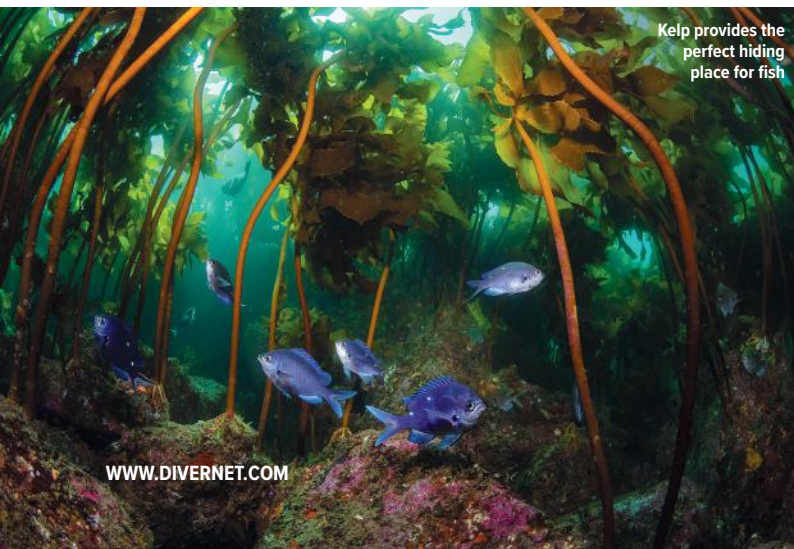
The Lost World – This site was the most unique as far as underwater topography and exploration, evoking a sense of childlike wonder - like stumbling upon a real-life Treasure Island. To find The Lost World you descend down a wall face and head through a tunnel with a rippled sandy bottom. To ensure you get the most out of this particular dive I'd advise taking a torch to explore the walls of the 25-metre tunnel, and to try and dive it on a relatively sunny day so you can appreciate the rays that pour into the cavern at the end. As you approach the sun-drenched opening, follow



The variety of fish species is impressive



One of the many wrecks adorned in colourful coral



Kelp provides the perfect hiding place for fish

the light up to about 5m of water where an oversaturated kelp-covered garden is revealed, further complimented by an abundance of waratah anemones that pepper the surrounding rock walls. At this stage you can surface and take a moment to appreciate the fully enclosed ethereal grotto with walls that stretch up to ten metres high, and a hole in the wall face that has thick green jungle pouring through. This dramatic scene presented another great opportunity for some split shots, as the beauty above and below the surface complimented each other nicely. ▶

The fish are used to divers and snorkellers and will happily get close



“ When I managed to pull focus from the spectacle that was unfolding I also noticed an abundance of multicolour seaweeds, algae and macro life that covered the walls – nudibranchs, eels, scorpionfish and more ”

Final thoughts

The Poor Knights marine reserve offers around 50-60 named dive sites with a diverse selection of arches, caves, walls, swim-throughs, and pinnacles. And although I was only able to see nine of them, it offered me a different sort of dive experience I had never experienced prior. Given the sheer multitude of arches and caves I'd advise taking a torch with you on every dive, and although there is an abundance of macro life clinging to every wall I'd highly advise arming yourself with a wide angle (or even fish eye) lens to capture the world-class dramatic topography.

Water temperatures can run quite low – even in the summer months where we experienced 17 degree C water – so my two cents would be to bring a drysuit with you to extend your bottom time. One of the things I loved about Northland Dive is although they have a Divemaster guide you through the sites, they're also willing to give experienced divers a comprehensive briefing of the site and send you on your way – an underwater photographer's dream scenario. But given the potential for raging currents, be sure to know your limits and always dive with an SMB.

Exploring the Poor Knights holds a special place in my heart forever, and has given me a new-found respect for temperate diving. I would love to see more people discover one of the world's most-overlooked dive regions and be humbled by the sheer abundance of fish life and biodiversity within this remarkable, remote marine reserve. ■



Nudibranch among the seaweed

Stunning sunset over the islands



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Mustard's MASTERCLASS

Alex Mustard explains why it is imperative that photographers wait for the opportune moment to squeeze that shutter release

Photographs by Alex Mustard

There is always something to learn from the great photographers, even if our work never comes close to theirs. I'd never encourage you to become a photo-copier, but all successful photographers get ideas and inspiration from looking at the work of others.

I've often thought that this works best for underwater photographers when we look beyond the sea. Not only does getting inspiration from land photographers make it impossible to fall into the trap of duplication, it also infuses the genre of underwater photography with really fresh ideas.

Legendary French photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson's work became celebrated in the 1940s and 1950s and he is championed as the master of capturing the decisive moment in his photographs. Although his most-famous medium of black and white street-photography in post-War Paris seems far removed from modern underwater photography, I think that all our images have much to benefit from being influenced by work, while not attempting in any way to copy it. And I plan to show how universal his lessons are by talking about the branch of underwater photography that is perhaps furthest from his work – shooting colourful underwater scenery!

Photographs are at their most powerful when a single image tells a story and leaves the viewer in no doubt why that specific moment has been preserved forever. Seek out Cartier-Bresson's street photography and you will see compositions that are timed to perfection capturing fleeting situations, one-offs that give the feeling that they could never be repeated. This is what draws us into his pictures. Most underwater photographers can produce a decent picture, but a sharp, well-exposed photograph has little value if it lacks a moment that gives it the narrative or emotional power to connect with a viewer. In other words, timing is everything.

Cartier-Bresson's next key attribute was clarity of communication. When you look at his pictures you know exactly why he took that photo. This isn't necessarily because he captured some great

spectacle, but because his images tell complete stories. In his pictures every noticeable element within the frame earns its place, guiding the viewer's eye and reinforcing why that moment was worth preserving, worth showing. Strong photography leaves no doubt about its purpose through images distilled to pure and powerful compositions.

The Frenchman also demonstrated that it is often the small details that can elevate an image. A subtle gesture, a glance, or the positioning of a hand could transform a standard scene into something extraordinary. Learning to observe patiently, rather than constantly shooting, allows photographers to anticipate when these fleeting details will appear. It is a hard skill to develop. Too often the photographer chat I hear on dive boats revolves around camera technicalities. It is always 'how many frames per second can your strobe do?' rather than any discussion what the decisive moment is that they are actually hoping to capture!

Wide angle scenic shooting can often feel like landscape photography as we perfect our composition of a static scene. Underwater we're fortunate that we can move in three dimensions and even small movements of our wide-angle lens make large differences in the arrangement of the foreground and background elements in the frame. Add in a zoom function to the lens and we can make these elements grown or shrink independent of each other. For example, back off and zoom in and the foreground will stay the same, but now the background will be much larger in the frame. Surely, all this is enough to be grappling with?

Cartier-Bresson would implore us to push further. Once the basics of the composition are assembled it is time to turn to our power of observation. The corals and the position of the sun are not moving, but many other elements in our wide-angle compositions are constantly changing, and in this is where we can find the magic of gestures and memorable moments.

For example, if the sun is intended as an eye-catching element of the composition then there is ▶

Scenery doesn't move,
but fish do. Time your
shot for the peak position





“ In a close-up shot this might be an eyeline that reinforces the subject, or in a more-distant composition this might mean bending their body to mirror the curve in the main subject ”

definitely a rhythm to tune into as the waves focus and blur the beams. We want to time our shot for the peak of the rays. I also like to wait until a wave runs right through the sunball, splitting the light and making the exposure easier to manage. If we are including people in the composition, particularly distant silhouette models, their shape in the picture is another source of the decisive moment. We should always watch their form and click the shutter when they are at their most elegant. When divers fin their legs straighten and their silhouette becomes more attractive, this is the ideal time to shoot. Experienced photographers will often encourage models to react to the scene they are in. In a close-up shot this might be an eyeline that reinforces the subject, or in a more-distant composition this might mean bending their body to mirror the curve in the main subject. These are details that give compositions power.

Marine life is always on the move and the most-common source of gestures and decisive moments in scenic compositions. There are endless options, but most universal is elevating a scene by timing the shot to catch small fish in just the right places. It is the shots where the fish is so perfectly positioned that it looks like it was placed there, which really resonate.

Look up Shunsuke Nakano's black and white winner from this year's UPY contest for a perfect example, which particularly being black and white oozes with Cartier-Bresson's photographic DNA, both in terms of a decisive moment and a clarity of vision.

Next time you are shooting reef scenery see it as a two-stage process. Stage one is dialling it in, where you optimise the main compositional elements, get settings correct and perfect the strobe powers and positions. Stage two is about observation and timing, searching for exactly the right moment to preserve forever and sprinkle some Cartier-Bresson stardust into your photography.

Ultimately, what underwater photographers can learn from Henri CartierBresson comes from adopting his mindset. I am not suggesting you start shooting black and white people pictures underwater. Instead learn to value observation over haste, timing over spray and pray, and dare I say, the end result over the equipment used to create it.

Memorable photos should not come easy, first we need to ensure they are technically correct and then through detailed observation we can include that momentary gesture or decisive moment that makes imagery unforgettable. ■

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SCUE ME

The PADI Rescue Diver course is often referred to as one of the most-enjoyable and challenging recreational qualifications offered by the training agency – Luke Evans added it to his diving resume in Malta, and is inclined to agree with this sentiment

Photographs by Mark Evans

Many divers who are exploring our watery world for fun stop when they have done their Advanced Open Water Diver course (or equivalent), with some who are more keen notching up a few Specialties as well. However, after my latest course, I believe recreational divers should seriously consider getting their Rescue Diver certification as it certainly makes you look at your fellow divers in a different way.

Where my previous courses – Open Water Diver and Advanced Open Water Diver, plus Deep, Wreck, Navigation, Nitrox and Peak Performance Buoyancy Specialties – were all about learning new skills to enhance my own diving, the Rescue Course gives you the tools to become a more-confident diver, and a better dive buddy.

I was aiming to get my Rescue Diver anyway, as with over 300 dives to my name and a batch of certifications, I was only a small step away from having all of the prerequisites to get the Master Scuba Diver C-card. However, while I may still apply for this down the line, I have now got my eyes set on the Divemaster course, and having

Rescue Diver and EFR (Emergency First Response) were

prerequisites for this first rung on the professional ladder.

I will be completing my PADI Divemaster, followed by a six-week internship, in Bonaire in the coming months, so watch this space

for my thoughts on both those things. But first I had to get Rescue Diver completed, and my Dad was dead-set on me doing it in the UK, but most of the centres in our area did not start Rescue courses until later in the year, so I lucked out and jetted off on the short-haul flight to Malta. Warm water, sunshine, calm conditions. Now this is more like it, I thought. I may have been wrong on a few counts...

Arriving in Malta, we headed straight to Divewise Dive Centre to get my rental gear sorted, meet my instructors Misha Richards and Iona Morley, and then it was time to retire to the hotel for a few beers, some food and then a good night's sleep before starting the course the next day.

The sun might have been shining, and it was definitely shorts-and-T-shirt weather, but as for calm conditions – no chance! A storm front had rolled in, and the bay in front of the centre which is home to the house reef was under huge rollers smashing in on the shoreline. Hmm, maybe this is going to be a bit more challenging than I initially envisaged...

Learning new skills

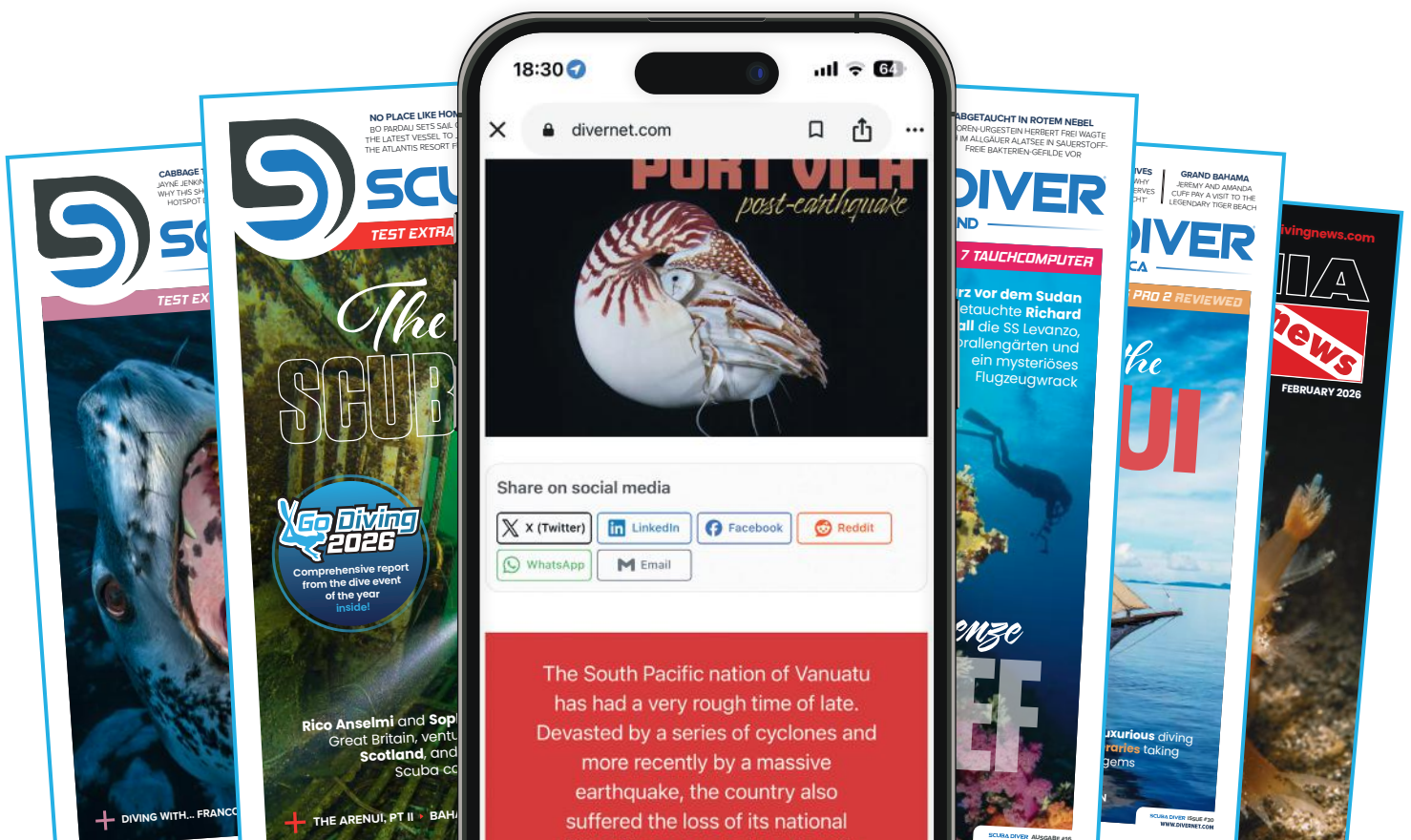
Morning came and while conditions had perhaps calmed down a little, potential dive sites were still limited, so our merry band – myself, fellow student Hannah Daniels, and instructors Misha and Iona – headed to Marsamxett Harbour, home to the X127 wreck. We got there early, but within an hour or so, more and more centres descended on the site – this is the 'go-to' site when the wind gets up!

The X127 is a 24-metre-long British water lighter that was sunk in 1942, and now lies upright on a slope, with her bow in 5m, and her stern in 22m. However, while most of the other groups who turned up disappeared off in the direction of the wreck, Hannah and I were barely going to scratch the surface of the location, as we were going to be mostly on the surface or in the shallows learning new rescue skills.

During my e-Learning, I knew that the course consisted of three parts - knowledge development, rescue training exercises, and open water rescue scenarios. The eLearning took care of most of the knowledge development, though we bolstered this throughout the more-practical sides of the training as well. This first day was all about learning rescue techniques, both from land and in-water. So Hannah and I were soon getting to grips with throw lines, life rings and ▶

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such like, before moving on to towing tired divers, assisting with leg cramps (and dealing with your own), bringing up an unresponsive dive from the seabed, and giving rescue breaths to a casualty while towing them towards land. We also learned how to deal with panicking divers on the surface, when you have to be careful in real life that you don't become a casualty yourself, and also ran through various search patterns which you would put into use if looking for a missing diver. The day was full-on, and we were in the water for several hours, but by the end of it we both felt prepped and ready for scenario day!

Back at Divewise, Misha ran us through an emergency oxygen kit, and the different types of mask that you can use to treat a casualty. We also discussed how to troubleshoot and fix minor equipment issues which, if left, could potentially fail on a dive, creating far more of an issue to deal with.

Challenging Cirkewwa

The weather had improved again, so more sites were on offer, but on arriving at Cirkewwa – a site I knew well, as I have dived the Double Arch and the two wrecks here in the past – it was still very choppy, with some serious surge washing in and out of the entry/exit points and against the rocky shoreline. This was going to be interesting!

Hannah and I got our kit put together, and Misha and Iona disappeared – very suspicious! They came back deep in conversation and Hannah and I both looked at one another and thought 'hmm, this could get interesting!'. We knew they'd been cooking up scenarios.

Iona started giving us a briefing on the dive we were planning to do, and suddenly, we became aware that Misha was nowhere to be seen. We hastily started to scan the crowds of divers setting up their gear on land, but then, as we began walking along the row of parked trucks, I glanced out to sea and there was Misha, arms flailing, in full panicked diver mode! I sprinted back to our truck to grab my mask and fins and then scrambled down to where I could get in. Hannah brought the life ring, and I headed out to lend assistance. I remembered my training, to keep a safe distance between myself and the panicking diver, and tried to calm them down with helpful advice, while getting them to grab on to the ring.

I then towed her back into the shallows, where Hannah helped me get her out of the water and back on dry land.

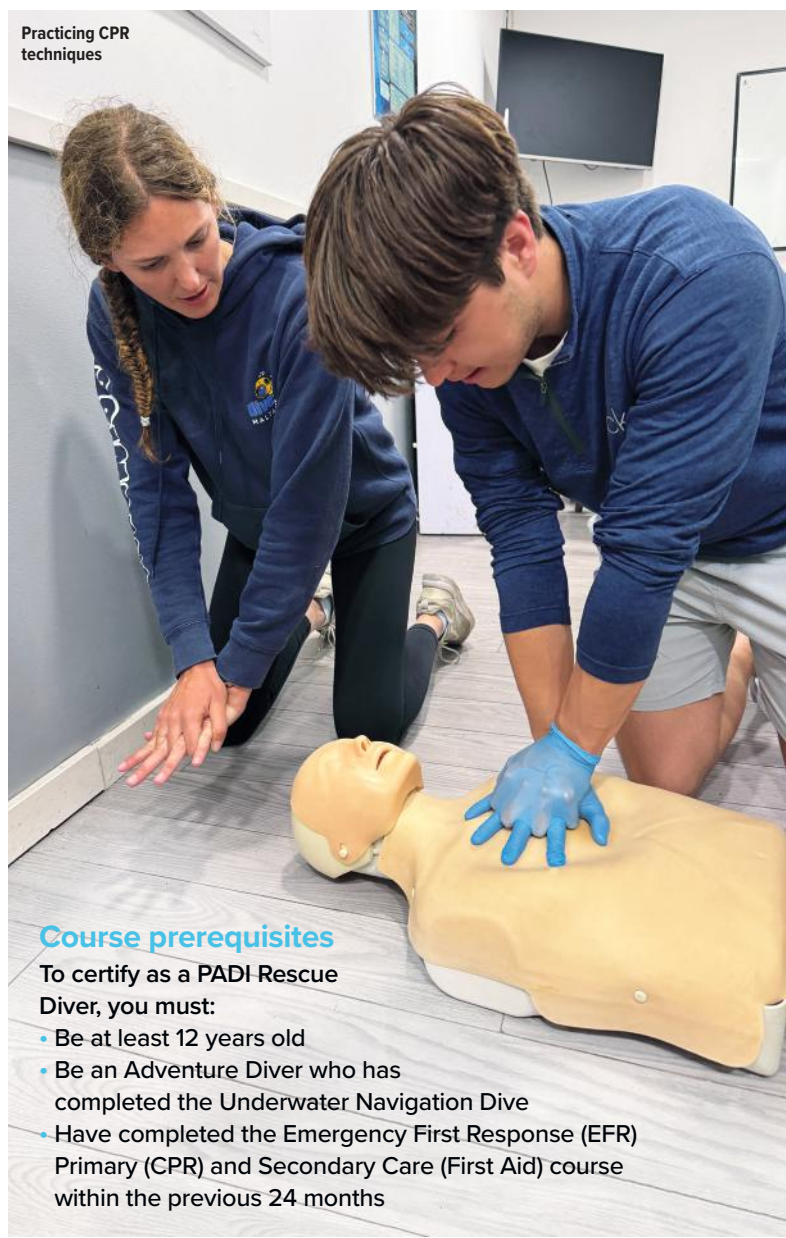
After a briefing and a chat about the scenario we'd just completed, we geared up and headed off on a dive. Throughout the dive, Hannah and I were watching both Misha and Iona like hawks, as we knew something would happen. Sure enough, Misha had some minor issues, and as we dealt with them, Iona vanished. Hannah and I swiftly started a search pattern, and eventually located Iona. I got hold of her and then carefully brought her back up to the surface, where Hannah was waiting to assist. I took hold of her arm and began pushing her in towards the exit point, while Hannah towed and delivered rescue breaths.

As we neared the shallows, the surge became far more noticeable, and we had to work hard to protect Iona from being battered into the rocks. We didn't need a real casualty!

Once next to the exit point, while Hannah continued rescue breaths, I removed Iona's BCD and fins, and then ▶



Misha explaining the oxygen kit



Practicing CPR techniques

Course prerequisites

To certify as a PADI Rescue Diver, you must:

- Be at least 12 years old
- Be an Adventure Diver who has completed the Underwater Navigation Dive
- Have completed the Emergency First Response (EFR) Primary (CPR) and Secondary Care (First Aid) course within the previous 24 months

How long does the Rescue Diver course take?

You can complete the knowledge development portion of the course in your own time, and at your own pace, by signing up for eLearning. The rescue training exercises and open water dives typically take place over two days after completing the knowledge development. If you also need to complete the EFR certification course, that will take another day.

Hannah Daniels - thoughts on the course

Having booked on the PADI Rescue Diver course with Divewise and doing the elearning prior to going to Malta, I knew that it would be challenging, but Misha and Iona made me feel really comfortable and always made sure we understood everything before moving on to something else. It was quite mentally challenging learning a lot of new skills on the first day and then putting them into practice with the scenarios on the second day. I am an RLSS pool lifeguard, and my training scenario experiences here helped me a lot to deal with the situations presented to us.

When we finished the last dive, it felt very rewarding. Especially with the weather on the last day, it was challenging with a lot of swell and rain, but it made it more interesting. There was more to think about, and made Luke and I work well as a team. Iona had to put a lot of trust in us to make sure she didn't smash into the rocks and become a real casualty. I think it actually made us learn a lot more than if the weather was calm and sunny. I now feel like a much-better diver for it.



Luke heading out to 'rescue' Misha



Hannah and Luke had to work hard to protect Iona in surge conditions



Carrying Iona out of the water

quickly got out of my own kit. Grabbing Iona under the arms, and with Hannah supporting her legs, we manhandled her up the slippery steps and on to the flat where rescue breaths could continue away from the water.

It was hard work towing a diver in such conditions, especially trying to keep their head out of the surge and deliver rescue breaths, but apart from the odd splash over her face, we managed to 'save' Iona pretty well, all things considered!

The Emergency First Response (EFR) Primary (CPR) and Secondary Care (First Aid) courses, which you also need to become a Rescue Diver, provide more-detailed instructions on how to give CPR, rescue breaths, put people into the recovery position, deal with fractures and open wounds, and so on, and are fun courses in their own right – on one of my scenarios, I had to deal with a poisoning victim, someone with a head wound, and a distressed person wielding a hammer (that caused the aforementioned head wound!). It

was good to have a lot going on to make you slow down, and think about who needs care first, and so on.

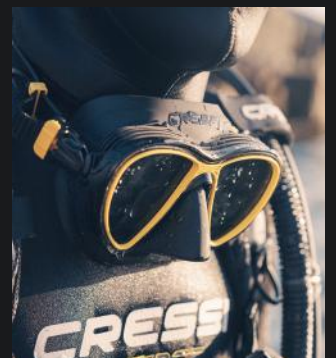
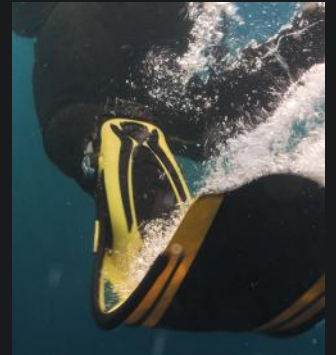
Conclusion

The Rescue Diver course is quite challenging, but also great fun, and I recommend it wholeheartedly to any recreational diver. Even if you have no desire to enter the professional ranks, or even get to Master Scuba Diver, having the Rescue Diver cert in your diving skills armoury will certainly make you a better dive buddy, and feel able to step in and lend a hand if, god forbid, you ended up in the middle of a diving incident. I notice I look at my fellow divers differently now, watching how they kit up, how they assemble their gear, and so on, and I find I am constantly aware of where other divers are underwater if we are diving as a group. Don't get me wrong, it doesn't take over your dive, but you do find yourself more aware and noticing things you might not have clocked before. ■

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EXPLORING SOUTH SULAWESI

Leaving the more well-known northern section of Sulawesi,
Don Silcock ventures into the lesser-explored region
to the south, in the company of the legendary
Edi Frommenwiler

Photographs by Don Silcock

Did you know?

Underwater photographers will capture some of their best-ever shots while diving in this pristine environment. Wakatobi National Park is Southeast Sulawesi's premier diving location.

“ One site in particular - Batu Alibaba - stood out for its superb visibility, magnificent sea fans and flourishing soft corals cascading down the wall, a vivid reminder that isolation often preserves what busier destinations lose ”

Our exploration of the long east coast of Sulawesi began in the north, in the famous Lembeh Strait, where we spent a few days diving its renowned black sand critter sites. From there we headed steadily south, leaving the deep offshore waters of the Molucca Sea behind before crossing the broad and often exposed Gulf of Tomini toward Central Sulawesi.

It was a compelling introduction to this lesser-visited region of Indonesia - a coastline shaped by tectonic forces, volcanic origins and the powerful influence of deep ocean currents, where dramatic limestone headlands plunge into deep blue water.

Central Sulawesi

Once across Tomini's open waters, Edi guided Pindito into the sheltered bays of the Balantak Peninsula, which forms the eastern arm of Central Sulawesi. The contrast was immediate: exposed sea gave way to calm anchorages framed by rugged hills and narrow coastal plains.

The peninsula takes its name from the Balantak people, an indigenous community with their own language and distinct cultural traditions. Remote and lightly developed, this remains one of the least-visited stretches of coastline in the province. We dived Pangkalaseang Bay and Tompotika Bay and were immediately struck by the health of the fringing reefs and the steep drop-offs. One site in particular - Batu Alibaba - stood out for its superb visibility, magnificent sea fans and flourishing soft corals cascading down the wall, a vivid reminder that isolation often preserves what busier destinations lose.

The Banggai Archipelago

Some 40km south of the Balantak Peninsula lies the Banggai Archipelago - our primary destination in Central Sulawesi. The chain stretches from Peleng, the largest island, to dozens of smaller islands, reefs and cays scattered across the surrounding sea. Peleng itself is a mountainous, heavily forested landmass rising more than 1,100 metres above sea level, while Banggai Island is the second largest in the group. Sandy bays, mangrove forests and intricate tidal channels weave between the islands, giving the region its distinctive coastal character.

Biogeographically, the archipelago lies within Wallacea - the remarkable transitional zone where Asian and Australian flora and fauna converge. That unusual evolutionary history has produced an extraordinary mix of species, many of them endemic. Among the most celebrated is the exquisite Banggai cardinalfish, found only in isolated shallow-water populations around these islands. ▶





Dragonets come in all colours in Indonesia

Its restricted distribution and delicate beauty have made it both iconic and vulnerable to the illegal aquarium trade, where it remains highly prized.

Our first port of call was on the north coast of Peleng at the freshwater lake of Paisu Pok near the village of Lukpanenteng. In the local language, 'Paisu' means water and 'Pok' means black - an apt description. The lake's dark appearance comes from dense seagrass beds and the remains of centuries-old, submerged tree trunks that stain and shadow its floor. Despite the cool temperature, the water of Paisu Pok was, in fact, crystal clear - provided the debris on the bottom was left undisturbed.

Before leaving the northern reaches of the archipelago, we dived a nearby reef and encountered the first signs of an issue that has caused significant damage in parts of southern Sulawesi: dynamite fishing.

Large sections of reef were covered in healthy hard corals, but between them lay fields of broken rubble - the unmistakable aftermath of explosive fishing. The contrast was stark: resilience and destruction side by side.



Sponge formation in complementary colours



Anyone familiar with Edi's subtly crude humour knows: the suit is his!

Such healthy gorgonian fields are rare these days



Silverback Atoll

From Banggai, our expedition leader - the celebrated explorer and liveaboard pioneer Edi Frommenwiler - pointed the venerable Pindito south toward Silverback Atoll in the Banda Sea.

The name inevitably sparked curiosity. How did a remote atoll in the northwestern Banda Sea come to be named after a primate from equatorial Africa?

A silverback is the mature male - the dominant leader and protector of a gorilla troop, distinguished by the silver hair that develops across his back with age.

The connection becomes clearer once you know that Edi was christened the 'silverback of Raja Ampat diving' by David Shem-Tov, himself famous for surviving a saltwater crocodile attack in 2009 at the Blue Water Mangroves of Misool. The nickname has endured - and not without reason.

Remote and fully exposed to the elements, Silverback Atoll can only be dived at certain times of the year, as there is nowhere to shelter. But Edi's careful planning delivered perfect conditions - flat calm seas that allowed us to explore the atoll's spectacular walls which plunge into the depths of the Banda Sea.

South Sulawesi - Palau Menui

The Menui Islands (Pulau Menui in Indonesian) was our first port of call in the south of Sulawesi and we arrived early morning after an overnight sail from Silverback Atoll.

Located about 80km to the northeast of the large coastal city of Kendari, Menui is a remote, low-lying and sparsely populated oceanic island best known for its bird-life, which includes five Wallacean endemic species. We dived three different locations around the main island - Lighthouse Reef, Southwest Menui and Menui Ridge, all of which had healthy hard and soft coral coverage, some beautiful sea whips and excellent visibility.

Wakatobi National Park - The Jewel in the Crown

From Menui, we headed south again to dive our primary destination in South Sulawesi, the renowned Wakatobi Marine Park - Indonesia's third-largest marine park and what Jacques Cousteau is said to have described as an 'Underwater Nirvana'.



No other dive safari boat resembles the snow-white Pindito

Edi Frommenwiler - the Silverback of Raja Ampat

Edi is a truly unique individual who single-handedly launched the Indonesian liveaboard industry when he designed and built the German Lloyds-certified Pindito on a beach in South Kalimantan in 1992. Simply stated, nobody knows the dive sites and waters of the vast Indonesian archipelago as well as he does and if you are going to explore those waters, do it with a silverback!



A paradisiacal, pristine coral formation

The marine park was established in 2002, and its name is an acronym derived from the first two letters of the four main islands - Wangi-wangi, Kaledupa, Tomia, and Binongko. In total it covers an area of some 1.4 million hectares, has a total of 142 islands - only which nine are inhabited - and hosts an estimated 900 tropical coral reefs.

The region is sparsely populated, with around 120,000 residents, approximately 9% of whom belong to Bajau communities - the seafaring nomads who inhabit many of Indonesia's remote islands.

Diving Wakatobi

Our original plan was to spend four days diving Wakatobi before heading southwest across the Banda Sea to Komodo. But Edi, ever watchful of the weather, was confronted with a force majeure situation when a major stormfront barreled toward us from the central Banda Sea.

He turned Pindito westward and sought shelter in Passarwadja Bay, on the southeast coast of Buton Island, where we dived for two days as the storm passed.

Although our time around Wangi-Wangi was limited, for me it offered the very best diving of the entire trip - and a return to Wakatobi is now high on my list. ▶



Enchanting aerial view - and not a ship in sight



Sponge potpourri on the steep wall

Buton Island – Black Sand Surprises

Passarwadja Bay proved to be an ideal location to swap from wide-angle to macro. Its black sand slopes hosted an impressive variety of photogenic critters, and the two days we spent there passed both quickly and productively.

While not at the same level as Lembeh Strait for the truly weird and wonderful, it remains an excellent location and well worth exploring.

Taka Bonerate – Sadness and Light...

Our final dives were at Taka Bonerate National Park in the Selayar Archipelago on the southern tip of South Sulawesi. It is the third-largest atoll system in the world, after Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands and Suvadiva in the Maldives.

Although our visit was dictated by the storm, I was eager to see firsthand whether its reputation was justified.

Now designated a marine park, Taka Bonerate was once considered home to some of the most-pristine reefs in southern Sulawesi. However, it is now equally well known for the long-term impact of 'bom ikan' - the destructive practice of dynamite fishing.

Introduced by Japanese soldiers during World War Two and perpetuated for decades afterward using leftover armaments and later homemade explosives, the practice proved devastatingly efficient. Explosions not only killed reef inhabitants but shattered the reef structure itself, leaving behind circular blast zones of coral rubble.

Worse still, because that rubble is often kept in motion by waves and tidal currents, the solid substrate required for coral regrowth is lost.

Much has been done since the area was designated a national park in 1992. Patrols, community engagement and alternative livelihood programmes have sought to curb destructive fishing. Progress has been uneven - the park's vast size and remoteness make enforcement difficult - but there have been meaningful improvements.

What we observed were many of those blast circles but also reef tops in excellent condition where bombs had not struck, and walls that remained vibrant and alive. Again, resilience and damage existed side by side.

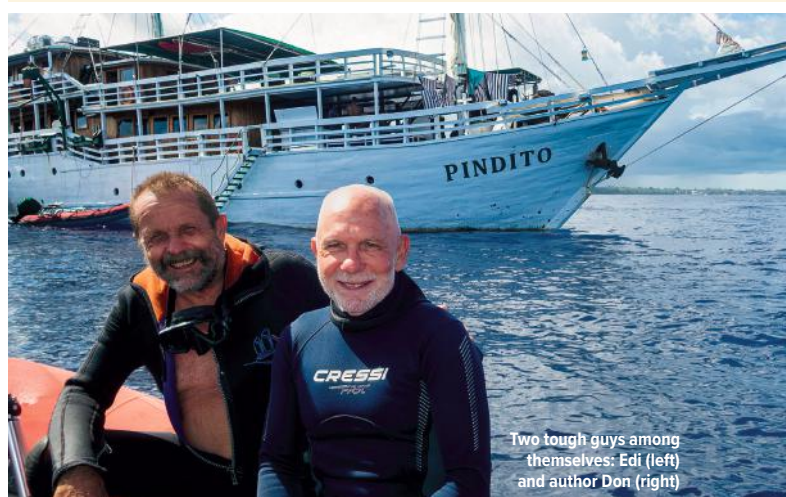
Diving South Sulawesi – Should You Go?

Central and southern Sulawesi remain largely 'off the grid' within Indonesia's dive scene. A handful of resorts operate in key areas but reaching them with a full complement of dive gear can be challenging.

Wakatobi stands out as the premier destination, well served by the upmarket Wakatobi Resort. But to truly experience the breadth of this vast coastline - from Banggai to Silverback, from Menui to Taka Bonerate - a liveaboard is the only realistic option.

Exploring it aboard Pindito, with Edi's vast experience guiding the way, exceeded every expectation.

South Sulawesi may not be the easiest corner of Indonesia to explore - but for those willing to venture beyond the obvious, it offers beauty, resilience and authenticity in equal measure. ■



Two tough guys among themselves: Edi (left) and author Don (right)

Lives only on Sulawesi's reefs: the magnificent Banggai cardinalfish



Don Silcock

Don is an Australian underwater photographer and SEACAM Ambassador based on the island of Bali in Indonesia and his website has extensive location guides, articles and images on some of the best diving locations in the Indo-Pacific region and 'big animal' experiences globally.

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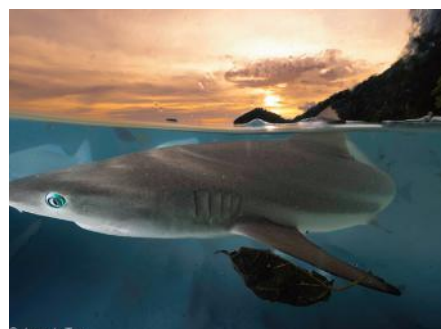
"While others follow a schedule, we follow your passion."

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

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#ASKMARK

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



@tbowen5324

#AskMark: In terms of sidemount, would you recommend to use both SPG and transmitter or just directly swap the SPG for transmitter?

For sidemount, I would generally not run both an SPG and a transmitter on the same cylinder unless you have a very specific reason to do so. In most cases, that just adds bulk, extra failure points, and more clutter around the first stage, which matters a lot more in sidemount than in backmount. If your set-up allows the transmitter to sit cleanly without sticking out or getting knocked, transmitters have more benefits than a SPG.

That said, plain SPGs are the more-foolproof choice. They are simple, robust, and easy for any diver to read and they cannot lose signal or power. Running both together does add redundancy and cross confirmation but, the extra hoses can make it a bit bulky. If you already own a pair of transmitters I'd use them, but classic brass and glass SPGs are widely trusted for a reason.



@toddjohnson2857

#AskMark: I've tried a couple of wetsuits and while the large fits me, it's too long on the arm. The salesman at the dive shop suggested that once in the water, the wetsuit arm would fit. Do you think this would be accurate?

Possibly. The problem with modern stretchy wetsuits is that when you pull a sleeve, the neoprene stretches instead of pulling it to where you want it to go. Once in the water and moving around, most suits do settle into the correct fit but, there are limits to how much.

Wetsuit fit tends to be an in-person judgement call based on where the neoprene is stretching and by how much.

Before wearing it in the ocean, I would wear it for a short while at the dive centre or at home to give the suit time to settle for its true fit. If you struggle to find a standard size that fits everywhere there are some models that have extended sizes for taller and shorter body shapes to look out for that may fit better.



@sheimong

#AskMark: Can you please talk about the use of titanium components? I've heard they got some sort of incompatibility with high oxygen content breathing gas, but I'm not sure of the exact science here.

Most titanium regulators will be limited to a maximum of 40% oxygen. Titanium does have its benefits for divers because it's light, it doesn't rust and it's strong. However it can cause high-pressure oxygen to ignite, which is why manufacturers limit their use to 40%. Rapid pressurisation is usually the main cause of ignition, and then that initial fire can provide enough energy to ignite nearby metal parts. Titanium regulators and parts are good for warm water, recreational nitrox mixes. But it's important that if your first stage has titanium parts, you pressurise your regulator gently by opening the cylinder valve as slowly as possible. Titanium parts in the second stage should be less affected due to lower pressures. But if you plan on diving high oxygen mixes I would recommend brass regulators.



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When we first started exploring the Red Sea in the early 1980s aboard the legendary Lady Jenny III and then on the Lady Jenny V, we took a keen interest in all of the nautical charts, particularly where the wreck symbol was positioned, as this would clearly indicate that a shipwreck of some sort or other would be visible on the surface or even just below.

One mark showed up further to the north in the Straits of Gubal and west of Sh'ab Ali (where the Thistlegorm and Dunraven are located) on a reef rarely travelled (at the time) at the northwestern corner of a teardrop-shaped reef called Shag Rock (Presumably named after the birds that dry their wings sitting on the exposed corals at the south of the reef).

This reef was somewhat dependent on the weather as this area of the Red Sea was quite exposed. Finally we made it up to the reef and dived into quite a strong current running to the south accompanied by a large pod of dolphins, so a zodiac was deployed for safety and the Lady Jenny went to the southern point and roped up to an exposed and dead lump of hard coral. Surprisingly, as we came to the wreck, the current appeared to sweep out further, leaving the site quite sheltered.

To say the least that this shipwreck was an absolutely stunning find is somewhat an understatement! Not having any idea of the ship's name at the time, the ship had apparently ploughed into the corner of the reef and the entire front end of the ship had now become completely

“ The stern in particular is quite beautiful and her rounded shape is framed in a cloud of the Red Sea anthias, Sohal surgeonfish are active and as you get into parts of the interior you will find crocodilefish, stonefish and scorpionfish ”

overgrown by the superb hard and soft corals from the main reef.

While we were the first to explore her, others soon took credit and she was mis-named the Sarah H, for want of an identification, in the meantime after a local Divemaster. However, this fabrication only caused more confusion (and still does) until her full identity was discovered. With the opening on the Suez Canal in 1869, there was a boom in shipbuilding in the UK to keep the supply routes to India and beyond well stocked with provisions to fuel the expansion of the Empire.

The steamship Kingston was 78 metres long and a beam of ten metres, weighing 1,449 tons and built in 1871 in Sunderland by Oswald Shipbuilding Co, and almost ten years to the day from when she was launched, the Kingston cleared Suez on 20 February but the Captain had mistaken his position as being further west and after retiring for the night, the ship ploughed into Shag Rock on the 22nd of that month. ▶

The Kingston

An underwater photograph of the shipwreck 'The Kingston' in the Straits of Gubal, Egypt. The wreck is heavily overgrown with diverse coral reefs, including branching and brain corals. The scene is teeming with life, featuring numerous small orange fish, several larger colorful fish (including a prominent one with a rainbow stripe), and other marine organisms. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through from above.

Did you know?

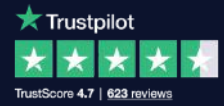
The Kingston was 78 metres long, ten metres wide and weighed 1,449 tons. The wreck lies in 4-15m of water and is easily accessible to divers of all skill levels. There is an abundance of soft and hard corals and numerous and varied reef fauna.

Lawson Wood, who was among the first group of divers to find the shipwreck, showcases the history of the steamship Kingston, which lies in Egypt's Straits of Gubal

Photographs by Lawson Wood



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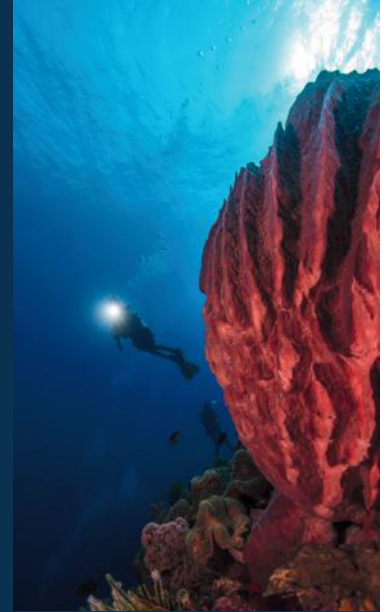
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She had been enroute to Aden, located in Southern Yemen, with its cargo of coal (Aden was a refuelling port midway between Europe and India, so ships like the Kingston were constantly carrying coal from Wales to Aden). Sadly, the ship was stuck fast and the breaches in her forward section filled up with seawater and she settled onto the seabed.

A passing ship set off for Suez, but before help could arrive, the ship had sunk and the crew took to their lifeboats. She was declared a total loss on 28 February 1881.

The Kingston is one of those perfect Red Sea wrecks, being located from the very shallowest parts of the Shag Rock reef down to 17m. The stern, with the intact rudder and propeller, sits upright on the seabed gently sloping up into the shallows and is completely intact and an absolute classic steam brigantine shape.

With her full cargo of coal, this weight has kept the Kingston thankfully in place on the reef. The ship was equipped with sails and a single funnel for its steam engine, which allowed it to travel at approximately 11 knots. Her steam boilers can still be seen on the top of the wreck, nearby her spare propeller and all of this section is very overgrown with coral. Both her masts are off to starboard and all of the machinery is almost unrecognisable due to the coral encrustation.

All of her wooden decks have since rotted away in years since her loss, but thankfully this lets us navigate within safety limits to her interior near the stern. Her cargo of coal is located in two holds amidships, with the now-open aspect of her deck beams and easy access, you can navigate quite easily in parts of the interior. ▶



The remnants are draped in soft corals



Archive shot of the Kingston

“ You will also find more wreckage embedded in the reef, clearly not from the Kingston and as yet, the name of this stricken vessel is still not known ”

The mast is covered in marine growth





Masked butterflyfish



Chromodoris quadricolour - also known as the pyjama nudi



Inside the Kingston

“ The stern, with the intact rudder and propellor, sits upright on the seabed gently sloping up into the shallows and is completely intact and an absolute classic steam brigantine shape ”

The metal spars are widely spaced and it is easy to drop through them without touching the sides and disturbing any marine life, here, check out the bottom for any critters if you want to sit or squat down to photograph up through the decks. This is a great and iconic view of the brigantine Kingston, particularly if you convert it into monochrome.

The stern in particular is quite beautiful and her rounded shape is framed in a cloud of the Red Sea anthias, Sohal surgeonfish are active and as you get into parts of the interior you will find crocodilefish, stonefish and scorpionfish. The usual Red Sea anemonefish can be found on a number of anemones here, but under the stern can be found huge numbers of the invasive golden cup corals (*Tubastrea coccinea*). If you do get the chance to dive the wreck at night, the underside of the stern is just a mass of brilliant yellow coral polyps. Cowrie shells, small shrimps and even Spanish dancer nudibranchs are common here and all make for an absolutely memorable dive.

As you leave the wreck, continue to the south with the gently sloping reef wall to your left. You will come across

the masts, one of which has the remnants of its crow's nest. You will also find more wreckage embedded in the reef, clearly not from the Kingston and as yet, the name of this stricken vessel is still not known, as very little is left of the ship to help identification.

The constant current starts to pick up around here and this will gently propel you along the wall. Table corals in particular are abundant and in very good condition, most of which have pairs of bright yellow butterflyfish and the usual striped Red Sea bannerfish.

As you continue along the reef slope, you will find that the seabed starts dropping away, so be careful with your time to depth ratio, as it is so easy to go a bit deeper in search of yet another amazing Red Sea vista. Some of the more-stony corals are found here and colourful soft corals are seen in the overhangs. There is also a mini Anemone Garden, with lots of juvenile clownfish and three-spot *Dascyllus*. There are some large openings to the southern end and these often have white-tip reef sharks resting inside as well as occasional turtles. ■

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TO DIVE OR NOT TO DIVE?

Skipping a dive can be necessary for various reasons. Recognising when to say 'no' is a vital safety skill, as Dr Dubravka Vejnović explains

We all know it's hard to resist a dive. Yet even with a medical clearance in your pocket, there are situations where staying dry is probably the better decision. Let's take a look at some reasons to sit out a dive.

Physical and mental well-being

Ask yourself, how are you feeling? Did you sleep all right, and are you well rested? Or did you have a bit of a party with your friends, and one or two drinks too many? I'm sure we've all been there more than once.

Are you under a lot of pressure due to things going on in your life, and do you feel you can't focus properly? Too much stress at work? Then maybe it would be better to give yourself some time to regain your strength and clear your mind before hitting the water.

Do you feel nauseous after a long boat ride? In some cases, getting underwater quickly, to a depth where you can't feel the waves, will make you feel better. However, keep in mind that gearing up in a rocking boat can lead to more nausea. Nobody but you can judge how you feel inside, so pay attention to the signals your body is sending you.

Are you congested or having a toothache? Taking a dive under such circumstances can only worsen your discomfort and might introduce additional health and safety complications. If you aren't feeling well, don't make it worse by pushing yourself!

Level of Training

Are you okay with the proposed dive plan? Do you find it reasonable, and is it in line with your training and experience? Maybe a group of divers invites you to join a dive that is a little beyond your level of training, or just generally too sketchy for your likes.

Saying 'no' can be hard: Maybe the dive site is tempting, or maybe you don't want to look weak. Remind yourself though why you started diving in the first place: My guess is to enjoy the underwater world. Would you enjoy being stressed underwater? I honestly doubt it.

Buddies

Are you comfortable with the people you are going to dive with? Can you rely on them above and below the surface, and do you have good communication? Do you think they're capable of handling problems? If you do not feel comfortable with a person who is supposed to be your buddy, you should



say so without being afraid of hurting people's feelings. I've often seen divers who aren't team players and act in unpredictable ways. Being such a diver's buddy is neither pleasant nor safe. Although it's good to be self-reliant in most situations while diving, it is always better to have someone with whom you feel safe by your side.

Equipment issues

Do you trust your equipment? If you're paying for rental gear, it's reasonable to expect equipment that fits you and works well. If you're not comfortable with it, you should request a change. Obviously, a sudden irreparable equipment malfunction is a reason to call a dive.

Maybe other divers will offer a piece of equipment that can bypass the problem, but if you don't feel confident using it, skip a dive. Remember: Take good care of your equipment, and it will take good care of you!

About the author

Dr Dubravka Vejnovic, from Belgrade, Serbia, is a DAN Europe Ambassador, technical diver, mother, and scientist with a Ph.D. in applied genetics. With over 15 years of diving experience, her expertise lies in CCR trimix diving, with a passion for wrecks and caves. As the only female member of the Triton Tec Team, the largest technical diving team in the Balkans and beyond, she stands out in the diving community. Dr Vejnovic is also a brand ambassador for SANTI, Poseidon SEE, and Technical Diving International, actively representing and promoting excellence in the diving world.



“ If you do not feel comfortable with a person who is supposed to be your buddy, you should say so without being afraid of hurting people’s feelings. I’ve often seen divers who aren’t team players and act in unpredictable ways ”

Dive conditions

Are the conditions suitable for diving? Some sites are remote and require financial expenses and physical effort to reach. Once you’ve made the effort to get there, calling a dive can be hard, even when unfavourable weather or other environmental conditions might warrant it.

Challenging conditions may include waves, currents, high winds, low visibility, or hazardous marine life. Waves and currents can make water entries and exits quite demanding, and even dangerous. Low visibility can ruin a dive, especially if you aren’t expecting it. Water temperatures are usually quite predictable, but may warrant a thicker wetsuit and more weights than you’re used to. You may even need a drysuit, which requires additional training. Both the temperature and the associated equipment changes can act as stressors. If you do not feel capable of handling these issues, do not dive.

Fear of missing out

It is often said that any diver can call a dive at any time and for any reason. However, in today’s fast-paced culture, it can be hard to accept losing the opportunity to do something. This is sometimes called FOMO, or Fear Of Missing Out – a feeling of apprehension to miss out on information or experiences. This can be amplified by social media, especially when the experience or activity in question is trending.

Ask yourself: Are you pushing yourself to do things to impress your friends and people on social media (such as sharing lots of underwater photos)? Are you really enjoying the present moment, or are you constantly thinking about the next item on your bucket list? Take your time. Enjoy your dive. Appreciate the company of your buddies and the fact that you are able to do the thing you love.

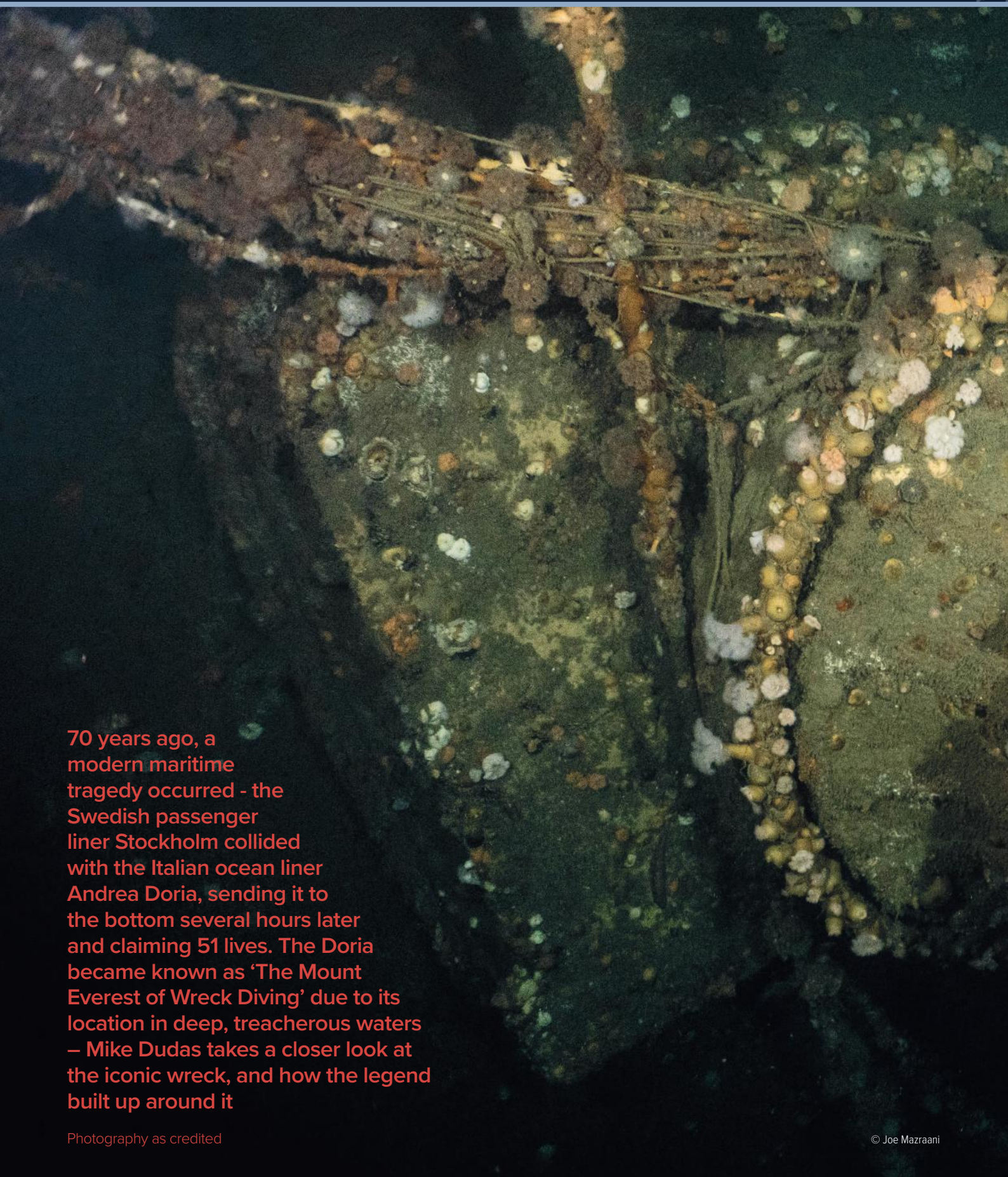


A wise person once said, ‘It’s much better to sit on the boat wishing you were diving than to be diving wishing you were sitting on the boat’. Often, problems can be caught prior to the dive, so that they don’t escalate in snowball fashion upon immersion. Pre-dive check lists go a long way in catching potential problems before they occur.

Finally, don’t put yourself and others in danger. We practise many different skills during our training. Knowing when to skip a dive is as important as any of them. ■

DAN Membership

Before taking the plunge make sure your DAN membership is still active. If it isn’t, join DAN or renew your membership at: www.daneurope.org
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70 years ago, a modern maritime tragedy occurred - the Swedish passenger liner Stockholm collided with the Italian ocean liner Andrea Doria, sending it to the bottom several hours later and claiming 51 lives. The Doria became known as 'The Mount Everest of Wreck Diving' due to its location in deep, treacherous waters – Mike Dudas takes a closer look at the iconic wreck, and how the legend built up around it

Photography as credited

© Joe Mazraani

The Andrea DORIA

Both ships were sailing in dense fog near the island of Nantucket, off the coast of Massachusetts, when the incident happened. The Andrea Doria was transiting the Atlantic Ocean to New York City and was preparing to arrive with a full complement of passengers. Some 12 hours after the ship was struck, she sank to the bottom, claiming 51 lives.

Immediately after the sinking, the wreck attracted the attention of Peter Gimbel, who dived the wreck with 48 hours of its sinking. At the time, this was a considerable feat considering scuba diving was still a nascent sport in the USA. The shipwreck also lay far offshore, 96km to Nantucket Island and 160km to the nearest port of embarkation. The Doria also sank in 76m of water and landed sideways on her starboard side. This meant that the highest point of the wreck was approximately 51m to the side of the hull - a considerable depth for the skill level and equipment at the time. Gimbel returned two weeks later and photographed the wreck for Life Magazine, creating some of the first colour underwater photos ever published.

After the end of World War Two, the process of rebuilding the Italian infrastructure included rebuilding the transportation systems. The construction and launch of the Andrea Doria came to symbolize the pride of Italy. She was not the largest liner at 213 metres long but was built to travel in comfort for three classes of passengers - First, Cabin, and Tourist class. In a new turn for ocean liners, she provided a swimming pool for each class.

The Andrea Doria also became well known as a floating art gallery. She was designed in a sleek Art Deco style, with furniture and styling in the mid-century style and contemporary art that included ceramic panels, tapestries, paintings, and sculptures heavily influenced by Picasso but all in a distinctly Italian style. ▶



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The Doria was outfitted with modern technology, including radar, that should have prevented the tragedy that would occur.

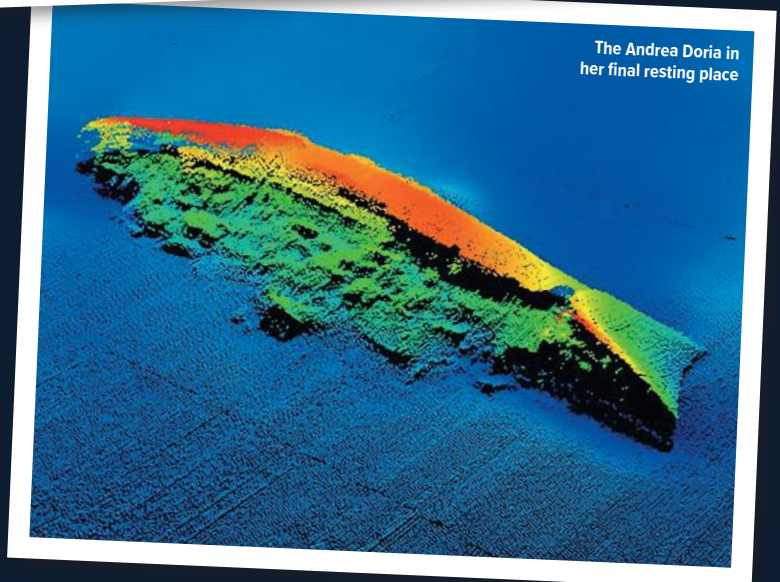
Just a few years after the sinking, the Andrea Doria began to attract salvage interests and sport divers. In the early 1960s, a salvage team led by Dan Turner aboard the vessel Top Cat recovered the bronze statue of the Admiral Doria, the ship's namesake. A few years later, the first group of sport divers dived the wreck in 1966, including John and Evelyn Dudas. John recovered the ship's bridge compass at the time. Over the next few years, Peter Gimbal returned to film some television specials, filmmaker Bruno Vailetti visited to make an Italian documentary film, and sport divers organized a few sporadic expeditions to the wreck.

At this time, the Andrea Doria earned the moniker 'The Mount Everest of Wreck Diving'. It was an achievement that pushed the boundaries of scuba diving both in diving but also in logistical challenges to get to the site to dive it. Besides the challenge of the depth of the wreck, the water is cold on the bottom year-round, ranging from 4-7 degrees C, and visibility is unpredictable and can be quite poor. The wreck also lies near the Nantucket Shoals, an area that is known for very unpredictable currents. Divers have reported cross currents moving in different directions at different depths. Throw in some sharks and the confusion of diving a wreck that is sideways, and that is quite a challenging recipe for divers.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the popularity of diving the Doria took off with the advent of several dive boats regularly visiting the wreck and spending a good bit of the summer months each year taking divers. The discovery of hordes of the decorative ship's china became a sought-after prize and a souvenir of proof that one had 'climbed' the wreck-diving Mount Everest. In 1989, Gary Gentile published what became the quintessential



Poster art of the Andrea Doria



The Andrea Doria in her final resting place

“ The rise in popularity of diving the Andrea Doria in the 1990s coincided with the rise of technical diving as a whole ”

book, *Dive to an Era*. This propelled the Andrea Doria into the broader interest of the diving community and captured the interest of divers internationally.

The rise in popularity of diving the Andrea Doria in the 1990s coincided with the rise of technical diving as a whole. Techniques and experience were exchanged between cave divers from Florida and wreck divers from the Northeast of the US. Tragically, there was also a rise in accidents and deaths from divers that corresponded to this increase in visits to the wreck. Sadly, the 'Mount Everest of Wreck Diving' also shared this facet of her namesake. ▶

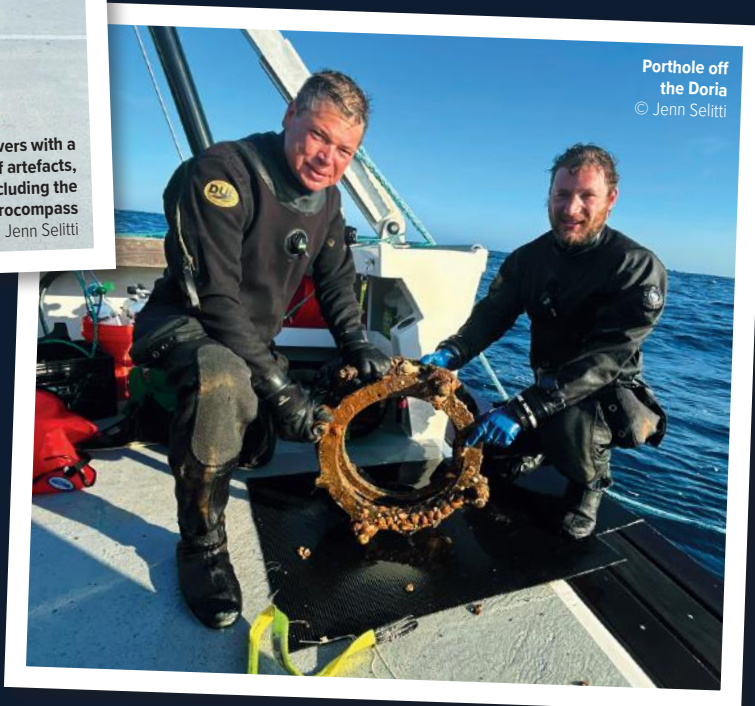
The anchor on the Doria
© Joe Mazraani





Divers with a haul of artefacts, including the gyrocompass
© Jenn Selitti

“ Mazraani spent several years meticulously stabilizing and preserving the foghorn to a fully functional state, and it can even be sounded today ”



Porthole off the Doria
© Jenn Selitti

Sometime around 2000, the shipwreck started to deteriorate rapidly and changed dramatically. Since then, every year that the wreck is dived, something changes. These changes have led to a significant decline in the number of divers visiting the wreck, with some experienced Doria divers noting that it's not worthwhile to dive the wreck as all of the learned experience and penetrations of the hallways, dining areas, and lounges were now entangled messes or simply gone, crushed as the decks peeled away from the wreck and the hull compressed.

In recent years, a large crack has appeared in the bow and has grown over the years along with the collapse of some of the holds. The stern of the ship has also broken away from the larger hull of the shipwreck and, while the decks at one time used to be nearly vertical, they are now canted at a 45-degree angle, if they are even accessible at all. The propellers, one of the most-notable landmarks and one of the highest points of the wreck, have

now twisted closer to the sand with the lower prop now nearly buried and upper prop at roughly 70m.

It's been said that the wreck has changed so much that there is no reason to dive as the chances of finding artefacts are reduced or it's simply not as grand a shipwreck as it once was. However, where one door closes, another opens - particular areas of the ship that were difficult to get to are now exposed, notably the ship's pharmacy and medical areas, and the car garage.

But opportunities to find significant artefacts still exist, as proven recently with some spectacular artefact recoveries. Since 2011, the only dive boat that has consistently dived the Andrea Doria has been the D/V Tenacious. In the summer of 2018, Captain Joe Mazraani and team member Tom Zajac recovered the ship's foghorn. It was found while diving the superstructure area that has now collapsed into a large debris field. The foghorn was found near the remains of the crow's nest and mast that was over the bridge of the ship. The large remains of the smokestack are one of the few large landmarks that are in the debris field. The foghorn was entangled in the ladder leading to the crow's nest and required the assistance of the entire dive team to free it and prepare it for recovery. ▶



The bell davit on the Doria
© Joe Mazraani

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The foghorn from the Doria
© Andrew Nagle

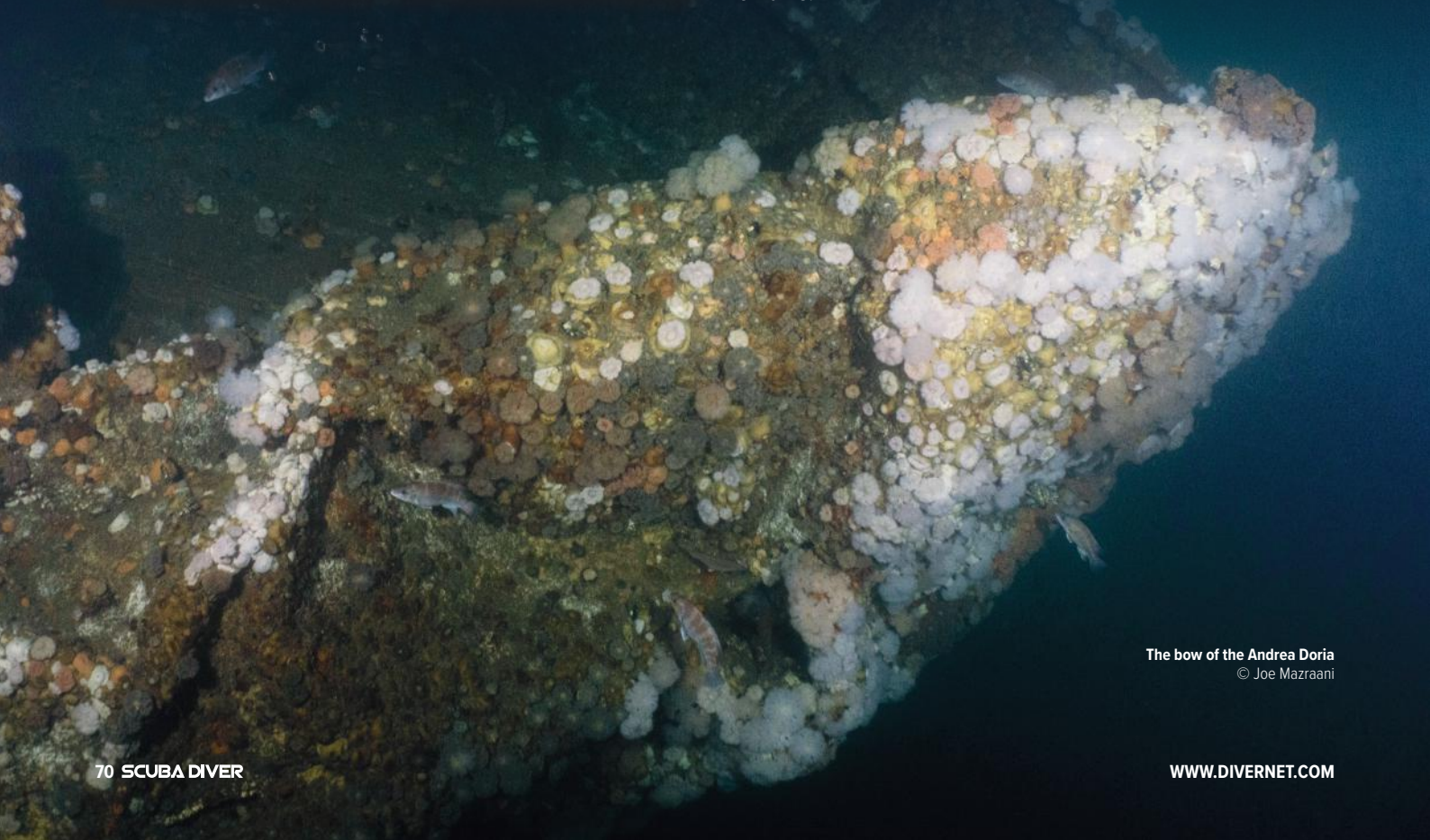
“ While the Andrea Doria is a changed wreck from her glory days of wreck diving, the shipwreck is no less interesting to dive ”

Mazraani spent several years meticulously stabilizing and preserving the foghorn to a fully functional state, and it can even be sounded today.

More recently, in the summer of 2025, the Tenacious crew was diving the bow area of the ship, and even more degradation of the wreck was observed, but the team was able to return to the debris field where the remains of the port bridge wing were found, now collapsed from 51m to 73m. In the debris of the bridge wing, Mazraani and team member Chris Ogden both separately located the gyrocompass that was located on the bridge wing.

After considerable effort to excavate debris, they worked together to recover it. The gyrocompass is an interesting artefact as it turns up in a number of stories from the expeditions of the previous 70 years. It was photographed by Peter Gimble for the Life magazine article in 1956. It was mentioned in an article about the Top Cat crew from 1963 as a potential recovery, and lastly the Italian film crew in 1969 attempted to recover it.

While the Andrea Doria is a changed wreck from her glory days of wreck diving, the shipwreck is no less interesting to dive, and it will continue to reveal its secrets to intrepid divers, little by little, as the ocean relentlessly erodes the remains. ■



The bow of the Andrea Doria
© Joe Mazraani

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SEALIFE SPORTDIVER SMARTPHONE UNDERWATER HOUSING SRP: US\$299.95

The original SeaLife SportDiver is making a comeback for 2026 with the latest updates present on SeaLife's other SportDiver models. The SeaLife SportDiver is a compact, lightweight underwater housing that fits most Android and Apple smartphones, and accommodates the new iPhone 17, iPhone 17 Pro, and up to iPhone 16 Pro Max (the iPhone 17 Pro Max requires SeaLife's slightly larger SportDiver ULTRA).

The iOS app works with all iPhones from iPhone 10 and up. The SportDiver also accommodates most Android models. Please check SeaLife's online directory to determine a particular phone's fit and compatibility.

The latest updates include SeaLife's new SportDiver sealed electronics module, that is resistant to water even while the door is open. This includes a new moisture alert sensor and other internal updates that ensure enjoyable and reliable use. Sealife has made these updates already to their SportDiver ULTRA (for larger phones) and to the SportDiver S models. The SeaLife SportDiver housing allows divers to take photos and video with their smartphone down to 40m. The durable housing is constructed of polycarbonate, stainless steel, aluminum, and optical grade glass. Although the SportDiver housing is 'heavy duty', it is not heavy. In fact, it weighs less than 641g on land and offers near-neutral buoyancy in water depending on the smartphone.

The SportDiver ergonomic design is easy to hold and use, featuring a large shutter lever and rear control buttons for

easy operation, even with dive gloves. Snorkellers and divers will be more creative with their photos or video

shot by using the advanced camera settings. Depending on your phone model, adjust Zoom, control Exposure, Auto/Manual Focus, White Balance, Lens selection, RAW+JPEG mode, and many more settings.

The SeaLife SportDiver includes the free SportDiver camera app for iOS and Android users. With the app, you can easily toggle between photo/video mode. The app utilizes the native phone camera technology, which results in the same high-quality photos and videos that you would expect. The app also offers a power-save mode that turns off the phone's camera and dims its display.

For enhanced imaging results, a removable underwater colour-correction filter is included with the SportDiver which restores natural underwater colours. The filter easily attaches or removes underwater and includes a safety tether to prevent loss. The SportDiver housing features triple 1/4-20 tripod mounts which mounts to any light or light tray with standard tripod threads such as SeaLife's own range of Sea Dragon underwater photo/video lights.

www.SeaLife-Cameras.com



ORCATORCH FLEXDIVE CANISTER | SRP: £689

The latest release from Orcatorch is a modular umbilical light, the FlexDive, which comes with a 98Wh battery pack. It has multiple outputs – it has an 8 degree focus beam, which pumps out 3,000 lumens for over five hours 40 minutes, or 1,000 lumens for over 22 and a half hours on its lowest power setting.

It also has a 150 degree wide beam, which delivers 6,200 lumens for two hours 40 minutes of burntime on high power, 2,800 lumens for six hours and 20 minutes on medium, and 1,200 lumens for 16 hours 30 minutes on the lowest setting. You can also opt to combine both light sources for an epic 8,000 lumens for two hours and 25 minutes of burntime. The canister has the novel ability to let you set the angle of the cable – it can come straight out of the top of the battery pack, or at a right-angle, depending on your gear configuration.

As with all Orcatorchs, it comes in a neat padded case, with a Goodman handle, lanyard, spare o-rings, and charging cables (USB-C/magnetic), plus a ball-mount.



There is also a FlexDive handheld version (£459), with an optional 49Wh battery pack. It comes in the padded case, with a Goodman handle, lanyard, spare o-rings, and charging cables (USB-C/magnetic), plus a ball-mount.

You can also go for the video light version, which has the larger 98Wh battery pack but without the umbilical cord. As with the other two, it comes in the padded case, with a Goodman handle, lanyard, spare o-rings, and charging cables (USB-C/magnetic), plus a ball-mount.

www.orcatorch.com

SCUBAPRO MK17 EVO 2/C370 | SRP: £465 AND MK11 EVO/C370 | SRP: £399

Compact and travel-ready, with optional, diver-changeable colour frame plate accessories that help you stand out, the redesigned C370 delivers personal style backed by the trusted performance divers expect from Scubapro.

The redesigned C370 now features optional diver-changeable colour frames, available in six colours, so you can personalize your regulator in seconds. The black C370 is sold with a standard graphite-coloured frame, and the white C370 is sold with a standard white frame. C370 colour frames are userchangeable and designed to be quick and easy to swap, enabling divers to personalize their gear or improve gear identification on the boat and underwater. C370 colour frames are sold separately (SRP: £8.59).

With the MK17 EVO 2/C370 you have a compact and lightweight regulator system ready to explore dive locales all over the world. The MK17 EVO 2 is more compact and lighter weight than its MK17 EVO predecessor and the MK19 EVO, thanks to its forged body, dry chamber with a twin spring layout for increased reliability and compactness. Small but powerful when it comes to air delivery, the C370 offers convenient user controls include a diver-adjustable inhalation effort knob, a coaxial dive/pre-dive lever and a large, easy-to-activate purge button.

The MK11 EVO/C370 is made for new divers, travel divers and avid recreational users. The balanced diaphragm MK11 EVO is more compact than its MK11 predecessor, with



a forged brass body, thermal fins and protective plastic bumpers to ward off scratches. It features an innovative double spring layout that contributes to overall compactness while improving reliability. The two HP ports are set on a 15-degree angle for more comfortable hose routing, and the four LP ports are all high-flow.

The compact C370 is small but mighty when it comes to air delivery. It's convenient user controls include a diver-adjustable inhalation effort knob, a coaxial dive/pre-dive lever and a large, easy to- activate purge button.

Scubapro offers a special version of its MK11 EVO/C370 regulator system that features unique white components, including the bumper, saddle, cap, and DIN or INT wheel on the first stage, and a white casing, front cover and exhaust tee on the second stage. Each stage includes dark gray logos and accents. The newly designed face plate is impact-resistant and colour customizable by the diver.

www.scubapro.com

OCEANIC PHOTON | SRP: £TBC

Oceanic has launched the Photon BCD, a next-generation buoyancy compensator designed to adapt to every diver and every dive. According to the company, it has been 'engineered with modularity, performance, and long-term versatility at its core, and redefines what it means for a BCD to truly grow with the diver'.

The Photon offers two distinct configurations:

Photon Air - Lightweight, compact, and streamlined, ideal for travelling divers seeking effortless buoyancy control across global dive destinations.

Photon Pro - Built for local diving and professionals, delivering higher lift, increased storage, and greater weight capacity for cold-water and demanding conditions.

Unlike traditional BCDs that lock divers into a narrow fit window, Photon is engineered for long-term adaptability. Its advanced adjustment system allows a single BCD to comfortably span multiple exposure configurations - from thin tropical wetsuits to bulky cold-water drysuits - while maintaining proper trim, balance, and comfort. This versatility makes Photon an ideal choice for instructors, travelling divers, and younger or newer divers who want a BCD they won't outgrow after a season or two.

You can upgrade or replace components as your diving evolves - wings, weight systems, and accessories are fully interchangeable for maximum customization. The Photon's multi-point adjustment architecture delivers exceptional fit



range within each size, allowing divers to fine-tune shoulder, torso, and waist dimensions. This ensures a secure, stable fit across different body types, exposure suits, and stages of a diver's progression.

There are three men's and two women's specific sizes per model, with ergonomic shoulder assemblies for enhanced comfort and performance.

Accessory options include colour kits, crotch strap kit, dive housing holster, utility storage pocket, and the innovative TankTamer quick-release band.

Packaging is made using recycled and recyclable materials, and the Photon BCD is constructed entirely with PFAS-free materials, supporting a safer environment for divers and marine ecosystems.

www.oceanicworldwide.com/photon-bc



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MARES PLANET 88X TBP | SRP: £782

Mark Evans: Mares have been at the forefront of regulator technology for decades, and with the Planet 88X TBP, the Italian company has released their most-innovative scuba regulator yet – engineered to deliver what they call Natural Breathing 2.0 through cutting-edge Airmatic Technology.

For the first time ever, a second stage regulator eliminates traditional springs and replaces them with a purely pneumatic valve, which Mares says offers ‘a breathing experience so effortless, it’s as if the air is simply there’.

At the heart of the Planet 88X TBP is Airmatic Technology – a revolutionary pneumatic system that minimizes mechanical parts and maximizes reliability. Unlike conventional regulators, this second stage is free from wear-prone springs. Instead, it uses intermediate pressure to control airflow, resulting in natural, resistance-free breathing.

Along with Mares’ signature VAD – Vortex Assisted Design – airflow remains powerful, direct, and responsive to the diver’s demand. VAD uses a bypass tube to create a vortex and low-pressure centre, which aids with diaphragm movement for natural breathing at all depths.





All Metal Technology makes it perfect for extreme cold water use, with the nickel-plated brass providing superior heat exchange, resisting icing in cold water and reduced dry mouth. There is a Manual Override button to control the airflow, along with a side-mounted pivoting purge button, and lightweight Superflex hose. The soft-but-firm mouthpiece is comfortable and supportive, and despite the second stage being metal, there was no feeling that you had to 'bite' down to keep it secure in your mouth.

The Planet balanced diaphragm second stage is perfectly paired with the 88X TBP first stage, featuring Mares proven high-performance technologies. The first stage has a metal body with a Pearl Chrome finish, TBP Dry Kit – proprietary twin piston technology, environmentally sealed for better performance on cold water dives, and AST – Auto Sealing Technology that keeps the first stage dry and free from dirt, ensuring reliable performance.

It has Natural DFC on all LP ports to ensure maximum delivery of air to the second stage, four low-pressure ports on a swivel turret, a fifth additional in-line low-pressure port, and an OPV – Overpressure Valve – that ensures uninterrupted regulator functionality in the unlikely event of an increase in intermediate pressure.

There are two symmetrical HP ports with a 10° port angle for perfect HP hose positioning, while the hexagonal DIN wheel ensures a firm grip, extra control and prevents slipping, even in wet conditions or when wearing gloves.

So what is the much-vaunted Airmatic Technology like in use? Well, I have to say that this is one of the smoothest breathing regulators I have ever used. Even when I started breathing extremely heavily on the reg to simulate a panicked diver, or someone having to work hard in a current, for instance, it effortlessly delivered the air to me. The side-mounted pivoting purge is quite ferocious, but given it is on a unique pivot, you can moderate how much you open this with little effort.

The first stage is relatively compact for a swivel turret unit, and the routing off the swivel is spot on, and avoided any odd bends or twists in any of the attached hoses. The reg gives a distinctive 'jet sound' on inhalation which you soon ignore, but this is a very small price to pay for such a high-performance regulator. It is fantastic to see big companies like Mares continuing to innovate, and I think we will be seeing more regulators utilising this technology in the near future.

www.mares.com





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CRESSI Z2 MASK – 80TH ANNIVERSARY | SRP: £89.99



Mark Evans: Cressi Sub is the oldest diving equipment manufacturing company in the world, and as it celebrates an incredible 80 years in existence, it has released a line of colourful anniversary gear which certainly stands out from the crowd. One of these is the 80th anniversary edition of the Cressi Z2 diving mask. Manufactured through an advanced moulding production process to achieve a state-of-the-art frameless structure, the Z2 is a very lightweight, low-profile single-lens mask, which means it is easy to clear from a flood or partial flood, and offers a fantastic range of vision – the peripheral view is particularly impressive.

Made of high-quality silicone, the soft skirt fit comfortably on my face, and the dual-button buckles were quick and simple to adjust.

The black and yellow colour scheme of this 80th anniversary edition really suits the mask, and gives it a nice old-school feel combined with a modern look. The Z2 comes in a padded, zippered case for storage and protection when you are travelling.

www.cressi.com



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CRESSI THOR EBS FINS - 80TH ANNIVERSARY | SRP: £139.99

Mark Evans: Another in the 80th anniversary line up are these Thor EBS fins, which as well as having a cool name, are particularly eye-catching in the yellow-and-black special edition colour scheme. It really highlights their unique shape and design features.

Cressi claims that 'the special arched profile of the fins, combined with the two central ribs, promotes a significant flow convection effect, known as 'spoon effect', which stabilises and boosts propulsion', and that the 'two lateral holes discharge the negative forces typically associated with this area and at the same time make for enhanced stability'. I have to say that in use, these fins do generate some serious thrust. That flexible section of the blade visibly arches as you fin. I found that with a standard flutter kick, you could get up quite a speed, but I was pleased that the feature also worked when you adopted a frogkick, and I could glide several metres from each kick cycle. While not as short and wide as the current crop of 'tech-style fins'. They are still quite compact, and I was able to adequately back-kick and perform helicopter turns, and so on. The blades are moulded from two different materials for improved reactivity, and the foot pocket, while being relatively pliable, still holds your booted foot securely and comfortably. Non-slip inserts on the bottom of the foot pocket ensure you don't lose traction on steps/boat decks,



etc. The bungee-style heel strap has a large loop that makes it very easy to locate and grab, even wearing thick neoprene gloves in ten degrees C water.

The fins come in four sizes - XS, S, M and L – and come in an 80th anniversary emblazoned fin bag. They are quite lightweight, so while they worked well with me in a drysuit, I could also see these being a favourite of travelling divers wanting a fin which delivers decent performance without weighing a ton.

www.cressi.com



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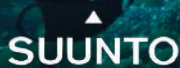
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THE WONDERS OF WAKATOBI
 Jeremy and Amanda Cuff make the pilgrimage to the fabled Indo dive hotspot and find it more than lives up to expectations.

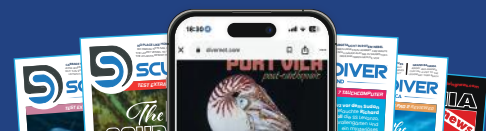
Q&A: ANDY AND MIRIAM GODDARD
 We chat to that stalwart of the British diving industry, Andy Goddard, and his daughter Miriam, about what the future holds for Andark.

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

JOINING A TRAFFIC JAM - UNDERWATER
 Nola Schoder takes a closer look at Miami Beach's new Reefline reef/ sculpture park, which currently consists of 22 'cars' lined up on the seabed, and will grow and expand over the next decade.

TECH: BUBBLELESS IN BUNAKEN
 John Kendall discovers the wonders of diving in the Bunaken Marine Park in North Sulawesi, and is blown away by the welcome he received at the Bunaken Oasis Dive Resort.

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MONTY'S MUSINGS



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

Photographs by Monty Halls

HAVE WE LOST THAT EXPLORER SPIRIT?

We can be creatures of habit, us divers. There's a kind of hive mind when we congregate, a collective urge for the familiar. This results in the annual trip to a beloved site - nothing wrong with that, of course, as there's comfort in the knowledge that you're in the safe hands of a tried-and-trusted operator, or can track your way through the site blindfold in two-metre swells.

There's also, of course, the obvious feature that no single dive is ever the same twice in a row. Much like the old saying that when you look at a river, then look away, your gaze will return to a different body of water as it flows past. Same applies to every bustling reef or shifting shoreline - it changes with the seasons, with species passing through, with every tide, and with wind and weather.

But there's merit in movement, in chucking away the well-thumbed guide book of your favourite site, and heading off to pastures anew. This has dawned on me over the last few days as I've made my way around the Hebrides. We've passed absolutely classic dive sites, ones that see a steady stream of divers who make their annual pilgrimage, frequent the same B&B, and down an ale in the same pub, at the same table. But we've also explored crystal-clear coves and rustling inlets, ones that make up the ragged edge of tiny islands serviced by simple stone slipways.

And at every one, I've peered over the side of the vessel and thought "Blimey, there's a dive and a half there." This thought has been accompanied by the realisation that I'm probably looking at a pioneer dive site, a place that has never been explored on scuba. Sounds a daft thing to say, but there's 4,000 miles of coastline up here in the Hebrides alone, and there's 790 islands around the coast of Scotland. Many, if not most, have never been dived.

What jewels await? What hidden arches, caverns, sea caves, walls and wrecks have never seen a diver? And who will be the one to find them?

That, in turn, got me thinking about the nomadic diver. Do they still exist? Those who chuck a small compressor into the back of a van along with a set of kit, spread a map on the bonnet, point at a likely stretch of coastline with a gnarly finger, and head off in a cloud of fumes and curiosity. There was a time when every dive site, even the ones crawling



with neoprene and novices, were undiscovered after all.

Someone had to be the first to explore them. Have we lost that pioneering spirit, I wonder? Are we so time-short and over-stretched that we have to know we're diving on a banker of a site? There'll be some beltters out there, hidden by swaying kelp or lying within the shadows of steeping cliffs. And what's more, if you do discover them, you can name them after yourself like some bewhiskered Victorian scientist wearing a frock coat wandering around pointing at new species and claiming them for the empire.

I'm going to have a bash at this over the summer. Grab a map, find a crinkly bit of coastline, get the gear, schelp it over the hill and heather, and jump in. Who knows, in a few years time, you could be jumping in on The Full Monty. ■

EVXX

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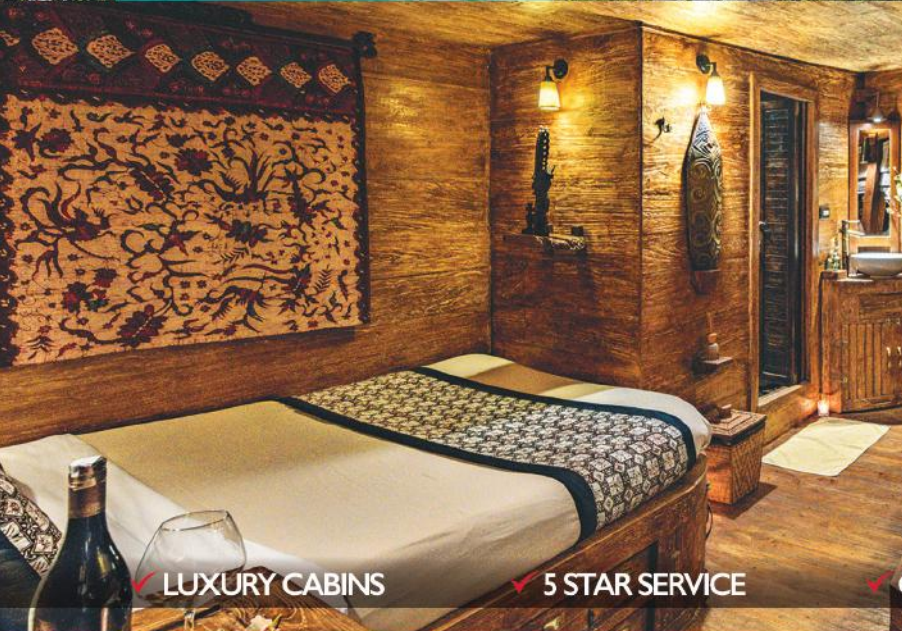


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