
supply as most divers should carry, in my opinion, and is certainly too small to provide much security for deep dives. However, used on a larger pony, it's a very slick setup. It weighs less than a separate regulator and valve combination and is significantly smaller. For traveling divers hampered by airlines' size and weight restrictions, the MAS with its own pony is a good choice. Compared with Spare Air (the obvious competitive target), the MAS is more easily serviced in remote locations, is much easier-breathing, and leaves both hands free to deal with emergencies.

List price for the complete MAS is \$599; street price is estimated at \$400–\$500.

The MAS without its own pony lists at \$499; street price should be \$325–\$425. Note that this configuration does not include the pony bottle adapter kit (see below) but can be mated without any adapter to various special-threaded Cliff Impact ponies, such as the ones sold as part of the Spare Air. In other words, somebody with an old or unwanted Spare Air could use its bottle with the MAS without any additional adapter.

The MAS pony bottle adapter kit, which allows the MAS to be used with any standard tank valve, lists for \$70 (estimated street price \$58–\$68).

The MAS is currently shipping only with the pin-type tank pressure gauge because USD still has quite a few of them in stock. When they're all gone, units will ship with the dial-type gauge instead. People who already have the pin gauge can order the dial gauge as an accessory. List is \$60 (estimated street price \$41–\$50).

Delmar Mesa

Club Carib, South Caicos

Diving on the edge — beyond the big-name resorts

South Caicos was a budding hot spot for divers during the '70s and early '80s, but tourism dried up after a gunfight on the airport tarmac between rival drug gangs sent scuba tourists dirt diving. I dropped in on South Caicos about nine years ago from the dive deck of the Sea Dancer and found squadrons of 25 to 30 eagle rays cruising the blue off its deep walls, along with large bull sharks, motorcycle-sized jewfish, and numerous other pelagics. I took a skiff ashore one evening and sat in the bar owned by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). The airplane registration numbers were still on the wall behind the bar where the DEA agent had written them to keep track of the Caicos' small-plane traffic during their sting operation. Barely a hotel and no dive operation on the island made live-aboards the only access to South Caicos diving then. Now a land-based operation has set up on the

island and a few intrepid divers have checked it out. Here's our report from a correspondent who likes his diving away from it all, out on the edge.

Dear Fellow Diver,

I dropped to the sand flat at 50 feet and swam toward the wall. As I drifted to 70, the sand erupted with a southern sting ray that would have filled a queen-sized bed. Swimming on, past

coral mounds topped with six-foot-high barrel sponges surrounded by schools of yellowtail, I dropped to 130 feet and glided past the deeply cut and undercut, color-encrusted wall. Around a point topped with black coral and gorgonians I exhaled and drifted down one more time. The sound of my bubbles became softer and the light faded. A long, horizontal cave opened in the wall in front

The owners assured me by phone that they were up and running: Come on down. The Club has 24 rooms (four of which are used for staff), but as a practical matter the hotel would be hard pressed to accommodate more than 20 guests. It's bargain diving at the current rate of \$499 a week, which covers room, all meals, and unlimited boat diving. The reservation number is 800-581-2582 or 407-381-2323. You can actually get there in one day by flying Lynx Air out of Fort Lauderdale for \$319 round-trip (954-772-9808); otherwise, it's American into Provo and then Sky King Air over to South.

Ditty Bag

Diving on a Singapore Layover

You might think that Singapore, an economic hub only 80 miles north of the equator, surrounded by Malaysia and Indonesia and hosting legions of travelers, would offer good local diving to those who would like to get wet.

Sorry, the world's second-busiest shipping port and a host of oil refineries make diving nonexistent. However, there is an answer for those who find themselves on a weekend layover.

The *Reclaim II*, owned and operated by Steve and Jason Marsden, a genial pair of U.K. university-trained marine biologists in their twenties, dives north of Bintan Island, northeast across the Straits of Singapore. These islands have been open to divers only in the past two years. Before that, they were closed by the Indonesian government after some enthusiastic underwater treasure hunters were accused of stealing government property.

Good Diving, Okay Food

The *Reclaim II*, a 65-foot, Malay-style, wooden boat built five years ago, is kept in excellent condition and is comfortable enough for short trips. Food is adequate, except for the sorrowful breakfast selection. Another major drawback is the compressor on deck; when it's running, the sound is impossible to escape. But aside from the fact that it's one of the few games in town, there are some pluses, and you *are* diving.

Entry is a three-foot drop off the side, and there's a stern ladder. A nice touch is the availability of short, 60-cf tanks for smaller divers. Oxygen is on board, and the boat has the usual complement of modern navigational equipment.

At a site called the Dolmen, I swam through a passage formed by giant granite blocks, reminiscent of a Druid burial mound, covered with a carpet of stunning soft corals. Another site, Tiger Shark Rock, displayed an astonishing number of huge *Didactis* anemones, with three different species of clownfish and an enormous brown moray.

Over 50 species of nudibranchs reside in the area; I found 6 in eight dives. During my short trip I spotted a school of squid, had an encounter with a friendly cuttlefish, investigated some strange white holothurians swarming a barrel sponge while several two-foot bumphead parrotfish meandered by, and enjoyed the usual mixture of butterflies and damselfish.

When and Where

The dive season runs from April to the end of October, but May–June and September–October are the best months. Starting this year, the boat will operate out of the Nongsa Marina on Bintan. A fast ferry leaving every morning from the Singapore Ferry Centre will get you there in about an hour. The *Reclaim II* makes only three-day trips, so you'll need a long weekend layover. There's another day boat called the *Typhoon*, a little catamaran used for day diving on some islands just off Singapore, but I don't recommend it — zero viz and little life.

No, the diving off Bintan Island doesn't compare with other parts of Indonesia, such as Manado and the Banda Sea. Visibility rarely exceeds 30 feet and there are few large fish. But the bottom line is that, if you are coming through the city on business and want to squeeze in some diving, this is the best way to do it.

The Marsdens will rent you a BC and regs, so bring only what you really need. Contact the Marsden Brothers at 011-65-778-8287, fax 011-65-773-2265, 25 Faber Park, Singapore 129113. Three days, two nights: \$304.

C. B.

of me. Just inside the darkness, a green moray that easily matched my height undulated eerily in the dim light of the cave's mouth. No time to spend at this depth. I ascended to the top of the wall, back to light, and met up once again with the massive ray.

The diving on South is often spectacular, largely pristine, and primarily deep. Only a few score divers per year have seen these walls since the early '80s. The coral is unbroken, the sponges large and intact, but best of all, you can dive for a week without seeing another group.

Why so few divers? The depth of the dives and strong surface currents coupled with rough seas for much of the year limit the appeal to intermediate and advanced divers, but the major reason has been the lack of facilities. Now there's Club Carib. The hotel had just been remodeled before my summer trip and was presentable in a Motel 8 sort of way — air-conditioned rooms, even cable TV.

Less presentable on this trip was the food. I know, food is a subjective thing, but my take on it was that it was terrible. Only once in a week did I see a fresh vegetable. Despite being on an island on which the main occupation is fishing, the dinner table never saw a fish. Meat was served in small, poorly prepared portions along with instant mashed potatoes. Breakfast was either stale cornflakes or two scrambled eggs with greasy bacon and toast. Lunch was usually a thin slice of ham or bologna with a slice of American cheese on white bread. "I'm here to dive" was my mantra at the table.

And dive I did. The dive operation at South provided low-key, personalized service. Each morning we decided when and

where we would do our dives. Since the dive sites were usually a 5- to 10-minute boat ride, we returned to the dock between dives. As a group, we did what we wanted on a schedule we chose.

The diving is mainly on the walls at the entrance to Cockburn Harbor in front of the hotel, but there's a good variety of diving and exploration within a 15-minute boat ride of the dock. On a Convair 440 that crashed on approach to the airport, schools of large horse-eye jacks swirled around the wreck and down the deep wall below. Excellent. Just west of the airplane is the Dream, a collection of massive coral heads overgrown with sponges and bursting with small tropicals, the wall below covered by large stands of black coral.

To the east of the harbor mouth are several deep dive spots, including the Grotto, the G Spot, and Eagle's Nest. These are the places to find such pelagics as reef, bull, hammerhead, and tiger sharks or schools of eagle rays swimming in formation. Old-timers on South speak of schools of 30 or more, but 15 is the largest seen in the last year, and 5 to 10 is more common. Unfortunately, this area has been used occasionally as a dumping ground, and there's some debris

on the bottom. Coral bleaching is also evident here because the water is warmer where the shallow Caicos bank meets the open sea.

Some shallow dives can be found along the top of the wall east of the harbor. The Arch, for example, is a large coral arch surrounded by coral heads and teeming with small tropicals, banded shrimp, brittle stars, spotted morays, and juvenile and adult drum. Inside the arch itself, a school of huge horse-eye jacks posed for wide-angle. I've scored two unusual shark sightings here on different trips — a 14-foot hammerhead and a man-sized mako (lost, no doubt).

I love this funky little island, warts and all. It's a dingy, dirty place with abandoned buildings and litter, but the reward at South is great diving. The risk is the state of the Club Carib at the time you show up. As I was departing, another dispute between owners and dive operator left the two new Carolina 24 dive boats sitting at the new dock Jacques Mayal designed with no divemasters to drive them, the compressor turned off, the E-6 photo processing machine still in its box, and the new rental gear hanging in the dive shop. But that's diving on the edge — the risk is worth the reward.

Q. C.

A Bridge Too Far Gone

When the plane lands in Micronesia's Palau airport, divers get off the plane on the island of Balbedob, then cross the bridge to the capital city, Koror. On September 26, the 450-foot center section of the bridge collapsed into the fast-flowing Renrak Channel 100 feet below. Several cars went into the drink and a few people died. Along with traffic, the bridge also carried electricity, telephone service, and water to Koror.

A few divers were stranded, but as of this printing most utilities have been restored and a ferry operation set up for transportation between the islands. However, if you've booked a land-based operation in Palau, I would advise contacting the resort ahead of time to see if it is fully operational.

J. Q.

Postmarks

Scubapro has parts and Bonaire has crime

Dear *Undercurrent*:

I would like to take this opportunity to respond to your article "Clash of the Titans Continues" from the September

1996 issue of *Undercurrent*. The article on the whole was fairly comprehensive, covering the most important issues for a potential buyer. There were, however, a few

mistakes in the article that I would like to clear up.

Undercurrent wrote that "(Scubapro) Mark 15 spare parts are limited and will run out." Parts in every field of manufacturing eventually become discontinued; however, parts for the MK15 are abundant and are not likely to be discontinued for years or even decades to come.