
ending up with one that didn't fail). Ikelite confirms that they've had trouble with their flash-tube suppliers and assures us that they've now changed suppliers. However, if you purchased a 200 in early or mid-1996, you may want to call Ikelite (800-IKELITE). The company will repair any such failures for free.

The 200 needs a lock on the on-off switch; it's much too easy to bump that switch into battery-test mode, which can quickly deplete the charge. The 150 and other Ike strobes have such a lock, and they don't even have the 200's battery-test mode. However, I would prefer an even better lock than the 150's, which tends to jam in whatever position you set it.

One other shortcoming in an otherwise outstanding high-end product (list price \$800 or \$850) is that the 200 has no internal slave sensor. There are times

when you'd like to be able to help your buddy with a slave shot, even if you don't normally work that way. However, there's a way to work around it. Ikelite's Remote TTL Slave Sensor mounts neatly on the shaft of Ike's quick-grip arm and connects to the bulkhead port on the bottom of the 200. The Remote TTL Slave is a pretty fine piece of gear in its own right. Its sensitivity is adjustable (a friend's strobe fired it successfully and repeatedly from about 50 feet away), and it's remarkably insensitive to flickering surface light. It's a whole lot more versatile than any built-in slave sensor in any other strobe, but still, for the money, I'd like to see Ikelite include at least a rudimentary built-in slave sensor in the 200.

On my loaner, the main O-ring wasn't easy to remove or to clean with a Q-tip, although it was a bore seal (unlike other Ikelite

strobes) and thus more or less self-cleaning. It made me nervous not to be able to remove the O-ring and inspect its groove every time I opened the strobe. Ikelite has said it will modify the cap in later versions to permit easier access to the O-ring. By the time you read this review, this change may already have been made.

The Bottom Line

Which strobe to use? For me, this was an easy choice: The Ai moves into my backup box, the 150 is long forgotten, and the 200 and the Smart Charger go on every trip with me. It's a major improvement in underwater strobes — faster recycle times and a new smaller, lighter, more efficient charging system. Photographers who need a wide-angle, high-output unit will find this much more convenient to carry and use than the old 150.

Delmar Mesa

Travel Notes

Adventures from Vietnam to St. Vincent

Vietnam

For the past few years I've been hearing overtures about diving Vietnam. A luxury replica of a wooden junk, the *Song Saigon*, has tried to operate as a live-aboard in Vietnam but seems to have faltered due to local politics and dynamite fishing. Last word I had was that it had moved from Nha Trang to Ho Chi Minh City (011-84-8-296750 or fax 011-84-8-231591). Reader Mel McCombie reports that he dropped by the coastal city of Nha Trang and dove with Blue Diving Club. "It is

an extremely well run operation: the owner, Jean-Pierre Prina, is a younger Cousteau clone, and his English divemaster-instructors are charming. The boats are typically Vietnamese and funky, but the gear is far better than the scary warnings in the *Lonely Planet Guide* implied — US Divers, new, and all gear and wetsuits are included in the price for the day, as is lunch. The cost is low, about \$30 for the day, inclusive.

"The diving is strange. The locals are very poor and fish with dynamite; indeed, they were

doing so as we pulled up to the dive site! The boat chased them off, but we heard and felt distant booms in the water later. Made us think the war never ended. . . . The result of the overfishing and the sewage runoff is, predictably, bad. There are no big fish, few small ones, a few cuttlefish, and zillions of urchins. However, if you find yourself in Vietnam and want an unusual entry in your logbook, I can recommend Blue Bubble. They are closed during the rainy season, late October to January; their telephone is 84-58-825390; fax is 84-58-824214. Just avoid the dynamite!"

St. Vincent

For those who know and keep track of such things, Young

Island, a resort 200 yards offshore St. Vincent, is rated as one the best resorts in the Caribbean — daily fresh-fruit basket and fresh-baked bread delivered to your room, king-sized beds, terrycloth bath robes, open-air showers, wall-sized louvered windows, and manicured grounds. The kids can get a scholarship if they want to go to college; if I go all the way to St. Vincent, I'm staying at Young Island. And I'll dive with Bill Tewes. Reader Bob Athanasiou (Troy, New York) backs up my sentiments in this report on his Christmas '96 trip to St. Vincent:

"Young Island is a classy resort. Rooms are actually sort of mini-condos built into the hillside. Those near the water get a bit more breeze and sound of the surf, while those at the hilltop get a better view at the expense of about 74 steps to climb. Pick something midway up the hill for a compromise. Food is included in the package, and the menu is varied and exotic.

"Dive St. Vincent is a small, friendly, easygoing, excellent dive operation run by Bill Tewes. The dive boat would pick me up at the Young Island dock and head out for a spot on the leeward side of the island at about 10 a.m. Many times, my wife Barbara and I were the only divers. Bill uses steel tanks, so you can drop some weight from your belt. The divemaster always dove with us but never imposed his or her profile on anyone.

"Water temperature at the end of December was 81°F. Air temperature varied from mid-80s to low 90s. St. Vincent has a rainy season that extends from June through most of December. We caught a bit of the end of it, but the showers were usually brief. The seas were usually quite calm on the leeward side of the island, and there was never a problem getting

into or out of the boat. Visibility was a good 80 to 100 feet.

"Corals are in great shape. I saw frogfish, scorpion fish, octopus, and sea horses on almost every dive, and spotted drum, morays by the dozen, along with the usual tropicals. I saw no large pelagics, but the night dive was extraordinary, with lots of critters. I have put St. Vincent on my list of places I would repeat, along with Little Cayman and Bonaire."

A St. Vincent travel tip: Fly the American Eagle from Puerto Rico to St. Vincent rather than Mustique Airlines from Barbados unless you enjoy waiting in

"The [Vietnamese] locals are very poor and fish with dynamite. Distant booms in the water made us think the war never ended."

airports and the thrill of six-seat, single-pilot, unscheduled flights. The best way to get in touch with Dive St. Vincent is via e-mail at bill2s@Caribsurf.com. Bill also has a web site at www.topher.net/~divestvincent/homenofr.html that includes complete information on the dive operation and accommodations as well as package prices.

Curaçao

Bonaire's urban sister island of Curaçao has been promoting diving ever since the oil industry went bust in the mid-1980s. Compared with Bonaire, Curaçao diving offers more vertical drops and more pristine reefs; the

tradeoff is that the water is usually not as calm as on Bonaire. Europeans have been the main visitors to Curaçao, and they have supported several dive operations on the island. Peter Hughes was one of the first to jump into the market, with his Underwater Curaçao, but Peter pulled out later and left the operation in the hands of the Seaquarium.

Recently Capt. Don's Habitat, known for its diving freedom, has spread out from Bonaire and opened Habitat Curaçao. Reader Denis Schneider (Round Rock, Texas) was the first to report on this new operation: "The dive sites are deserted on Curaçao compared with Bonaire, but the reefs are as good, if not better. Habitat Curaçao is one of the best dive operations I have used — new boat, new gear. Only had three people on the boat. Only negative was the lack of larger food fish like snappers and groupers. (800-327-6709 or 212-535-9530, fax 305-371-2337.)

Turks and Caicos

Rumor has it that the School for Field Studies on South Caicos is rehabbing some of its rooms with the idea of taking in dive tourists as well as students. Club Carib, the alternative on South, is reported to have a deep-V boat coming any day.

There is now diving on Middle Caicos; might be an experienced diver's dream. I'd like to take a look at this offer: rent a house for four people for \$850 per week (summer rates) and a Chris-Craft 30-footer for \$300 per week. There are 25 tanks and a four-stage compressor on site. If you bring your own divemaster, they give you the keys to the boat and a map of the sites! Contact Dick Zebo at 1-800-645-1179 or eagle1@fortmeyers.com. ■