

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

October 2001

Vol. 16, no. 10

Truk Lagoon, Micronesia

one by land, three by sea

IN THIS ISSUE:

Truk Lagoon, Micronesia . . .	1
Missed Connections	2
Rinn Rules	5
Travel Insurance in a Time of Terrorism	6
Dive Travel in These Turbulent Times . . .	8
Dacor Recall and Phony Tank Testing . . .	9
The State of the World's Reefs	9
World Atlas of Coral Reefs	10
Reaching the Reefs of Cuba	11
The Alternative to Scuba . .	13
A Better Snorkel?	14
Freediving Instruction	15
Flotsam & Jetsam	16

Website address is:
<http://www.undercurrent.org>

Editorial Office:

Ben Davison
Publisher and Editor
125 East Sir Francis Drake Blvd.
No. 200
Larkspur, CA 94939
BenDavison@aol.com

Dear Fellow Diver:

After a beautiful April sunset behind the island of Tonoas in Truk Lagoon, I backrolled into the water to drop to the Fujikawa Maru resting beneath. Nine backrolls later, our parade of marker lights rained down on the soft corals on this World War II Japanese cargo ship resting upright at 15 to 110 feet. The derricks and king posts had been transformed into figurative McDonald's arches draped with a rainbow of soft coral, each brilliant bush battling for room to blossom and feed. This was my fourth night in Truk and my first repeat dive. Soon, I was at 95 feet in the No. 2 cargo hold, revisiting several Zero fighter fuselages, propellers, engines and cowlings. A few unexpected bumps into other divers and wreckage reminded me that my purpose was different on this night dive -- it was about corals, creatures, and their transformation from day to night. An undulated moray, attracted to my video light, took me on a guided hunt around the pilot house, waiting impatiently for my light if I paused to film. As I slowly ascended in a spiral around the stack, an octopus came out for a round of peak-a-boo, never fully leaving his rusted home. The Fujikawa was worth its "must dive" rating, both day and night. And just one of many underwater reasons to make the long trek to Micronesia and the islands of Chuuk.

You see, Houston to Truk Lagoon covers 8,100 miles, 21 hours and changing planes in Honolulu and Guam. Some airlines allow a layover up to 72 hours at no additional charge in Honolulu; I didn't take it and my aching coach-class body resents my choice. Chuuk, by the way, is a member of the Federated States of Micronesia, for which America assumes both foreign policy and defense responsibilities. Guam is an American territory.

At the Chuuk Airport, the Blue Lagoon Resort (BLR) crew packed our bags into a curious caravan of vehicles for the 15-minute creep to the resort. BLR is built on a WWII Japanese airfield and has most of the sandy, swimmable beach on Weno Island. Before he passed away last year, owner Kimiuo Aisek recruited his nephew Mason, from Hawaii, to manage the BLR. "When a Chief asks," he said, "you better take that request very seriously." While Kimiuo's son Gradvin now owns the hotel and dive shop, Mason's American-style business savvy and his willingness to do most anything to help guests was shared by most of his staff (despite grocery stores with American prices and staff earning \$1.25/hour). BLR has more than 50 rooms, all with balconies facing the lagoon, mini-refrigerators, ceiling fans and TV's that receive three English-speaking channels programmed by someone playing movies on a VCR. They recommend drinking "purified" water from a 5-gallon jug in a room dispenser, but when I spotted a serious clump of green algae in my dispenser I passed. I had no water pressure for two mornings, so no flushing or showers until the pressure returned after breakfast. But, being on the ground, rather than a live-aboard, has one big advantage -- you can do it for less money.

The dive shop dock, lockers and rinse tank are at the hotel (the shop is 300 feet away, but you need to visit it only to check in). Blue Lagoon Dive Shop's (BLDS) wooden skiffs with sunshades hold six divers comfortably. When more show up between January to March, it would be crammed. The guides and drivers were always helpful setting up equipment and swapping tanks. After the first day, three divers on doubles got their own boat and guide, better for everyone. Rides to the wrecks were sometimes pleasant and other times major butt-busters with mask-on-face to pro-

tect me from the spray. During a surface interval on Eten Island, I made a belated safety check of the skiff. I asked our guide Chiney, "What if someone gets a hit? Is there a communication system or O₂?" "Yeah," he said, "I'll bring it tomorrow." True to his word, he proudly displayed a DAN O₂ kit stowed onboard the next day. I didn't know what to think about the poor diver on another skiff who may have actually needed the O₂ while it was on my skiff. Yelling from boat to boat appeared to be the only communication device. What one might expect, I suppose, at land-based prices.

Chiney is the saltiest of the diveguides, based on years of experience, knowledge, and the fade of his wetsuit. While his pleasant face shows signs of the sun's intensity, he appears ageless, maybe in his 50's, and is soft-spoken with a contagious smile and laugh. He usually found and hooked the wrecks quickly, then gave a thorough, mostly intelligible briefing.

Missed Connections

When America Airlines started hooking up with American Eagle in Puerto Rico for Bonaire flights, we thought that might mean an end to flight problems to Bonaire. After all, Air ALM had a terrible track record. However, we recently learned of a significant hitch.

Teresa Bailey flying from Dallas in August, arrived late on American. By the time she got to the American Eagle gate, her flight had departed. She was told there were no flights until Tuesday, three days later. She offered to pay extra to catch a flight to Curacao or Aruba, but again was told there was no flight until Tuesday. "The desk attendant offered us a room at a hotel he worked for," she told us, "so if for some reason a flight went out on a Sunday, he knew how to contact us." Turns out, a flight did go out the next day, but she was not contacted.

"After the fact," she said, "it seemed he was making extra money, while making us feel we were stuck in San Juan for the next three nights. We lost time, money, and our once-a-year dive vacation."

What's especially troubling here is that American Eagle didn't wait for its passengers, knowing full well it might be three days before they could get out. If you're ever in such a spot, insist that the carrier that got you there late — in this case American, not American Eagle — get you to your destination. American should have been able to do that even by backtracking through Miami. With fewer flights these days, this kind of problem may become more common, so keep in mind travel insurance.

P.S. Most policies would have reimbursed for unused advance payments to Bonaire hotels and dive operations, and Puerto Rico expenses.

His guiding made great dives even better. The only limits were dirty looks from my fellow divers and me at anyone who decided to grab a few more minutes of bottom time, which added 30 minutes of deco-time.

Those who stayed out of deco, as agreed, rocked and rolled in the skiff. Experiences within the wreck were largely based upon our guides' skills and their impression of the divers' skills. I carefully glided through many penetrations and they got progressively more interesting throughout the week.

Riding down the anchor line, at 60 feet I reached the massive superstructure of the Kansho Maru, which was dotted with Tridacna clams surrounded by halos of multicolored anthias. Working along the deck at 80 feet, while watching divers silhouetted by corals and seafans, I played with the turning mechanism of the bow gun, while a hawkfish perched on the barrel. The deck was a superhighway for saddled butterflyfish, sailfin tangs, parrotfish, sweetlips and an occasional banded pipefish. The well-preserved pilot house has a readable engine telegraph still capable of smooth operation. Pulling myself through the cabins and living space brought me to the galley, where a departing group had killed the visibility. I felt my way across a beautiful white tile floor with water faucets less than a foot above the tiles. The visibility cleared as I pulled myself out a window and onto a walkway facing the stern. Our guide was already swinging the group over to the engine room, a relatively easy penetration.



Rooms at the Blue Lagoon Resort

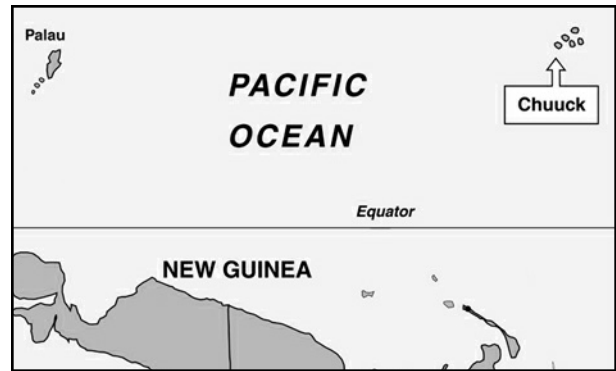
I didn't dive the deep "Million Dollar Wreck," the San Francisco Maru, which apparently beats the shallower wrecks hands down. It reportedly contains mines, munitions, aerial bombs, vehicles, tableware, mess kits, torpedoes, three battle tanks on the main deck, an easily accessible engine room, -- and toilets, a must shot for photographers. The opportunity to dive the San Francisco Maru is motivation enough to go through training for extended-time technical diving to earn some bottom time where few have traveled (and, therefore, few have stolen artifacts).

But, don't reject Truk because you think it's only for advanced and technical divers. I saw plenty of amazing sights above 100 feet, as did the rookies in our group. While I made three deco-dives during the week, the others were within sport diver limits. Halfway through a 19-dive package, my whole boat seemed ready for a shallow diversion for our third dive of the day: We wanted reef. Weather and distance seemed to forbid a trip to Jeep Island (on the fringe of the lagoon) with its ripping tidal currents, creatures and sharks. So we settled for what became a mediocre dive near the Fujikawa Maru. Other than a passing glance at a black-tipped reef shark, the reef offered little more than mountainous hard corals rising from the 20-40 foot sand bottom. Here, however, was the nursery for Truk Lagoon. Being into fish spotting, I made the most by trying to identify the juveniles.

Last year, my dive buddy made reef dives at Shark Island and Northeast Pass, a sloping reef beginning at 25 feet and dropping to sand at 110 feet with dense, healthy antler and plate corals. She found plenty of tropicals, including anemonefish, regal angelfish, foxface rabbitfish, black tip and whitetip sharks, an occasional crown-of-thorns, and Tridacna clams.

The shallowest battle tanks in Truk Lagoon are on the Nippo Maru, famous for pilot house shots of divers and artifacts next to the brightly colored engine telegraph. With the *Truk Aggressor* solidly moored to its lines, Chiney saw the

Aggressor's divers all at a safety stop on the line. So he hooked the wreck (BLDS's usual practice) by swinging his rebar hook onto the rail. Chiney soon felt like a fisherman who just lost a lure. Stew Esposito, the *Aggressor* Captain, had swum out and cut Chiney's line, which he proudly announced upon surfacing. Dripping with arrogance, Stew yelled that he "had been telling you guys not to hook the wrecks!" This time he decided to be judge and jury of his own law. An embarrassing case of a guy like Stew telling the locals who had been guiding dives here decades longer than the *Aggressor*, how they must preserve their local dive environment. Sixty years in salt water -- not BLDS's hook -- is slowly eating these steel wrecks and their cargo. I could see the spots where the wrecks had been hooked (three pieces of rebar about 2.5 feet long, curled out 180 degrees and clamped together, weighing less than 5 pounds). Nothing appeared broken, ripped or ruined, besides discrete patches of coral, sponge or algae. The argument for mooring lines plays better in reef environment than it does where huge steel ships are the attraction.



The mooring line on the Nipo Maru is potentially more dangerous to divers than hooking the wreck. Like most *Aggressor*-placed moorings, it's about 20 feet off the bow. These lines are often difficult to spot and challenging to reach from the superstructure while battling current. If the moored *Aggressor* happens to swing over the wreck, they drop ascent lines to help divers finish exploring the wreck at its shallowest point, often the superstructure and rarely the bow. Rebar hooks, once in place, improve diver safety. That should at least balance if not trump the seemingly negligible wear and tear to the wrecks from thirty years of being hooked. Better, tighter placement of more mooring lines (a cost BLDS couldn't begin to pay) would negate the advantages of hooks while still allowing multiple boats per wreck in their busy season.

So, while the *Aggressor* Captain offered third world people just another reason to resent American big-buck arrogance, we Michigan divers were not happy either, having been delayed 30 minutes, enough for some divers to get seasick. Finally, I found myself at the bow gun where a red-lipped blenny, having made a home of the barrel, invited me to stay awhile. Swinging down toward the tank, a graceful eagle ray whose spots appeared to be baby blue distracted me. The ray swam 10 feet away

doubling back and passing in front of me whenever I was falling behind. A quick inspection of the well-preserved vehicles and tank at 125 feet, then off to the brilliant red encrusting sponges adorning the helm and engine telegraph. A gas mask had been draped over the helm for good measure. This was one experience worth a little hang time.

One advantage of diving with a land-based operation is the opportunity to stretch your legs, try a few bars and restaurants and see the sights, if there are some. BLR's Island View Restaurant was decent, but painfully slow. I went for the banana pancakes for a consistent, and inexpensive breakfast, and stuck with

Truk Lagoon

Dive operations	★★★★★
Boats	★★★★ ^{1/2}
Diving for Experienced	★★★★★
Diving for Novices	★★★★★
Accommodations	★★★★ ^{1/2}
Food	★★ ^{1/2}
Money's worth	★★★★★

★ = poor

★★★★★ = excellent

Worldwide Scale

the Asian foods, especially soups and noodles. I quickly learned that what I had yesterday may be unavailable today, particularly fresh fruit. I ordered a box lunch the night before to eat between dives. The Truk Stop Hotel and Restaurant had good pizza, steak and lobster, priced \$15-\$30 with a drink. Alas, the plate for eating pizza wasn't appetizing as it was covered in ants and I crunched a rodeo-sized cockroach under my foot on each of my two visits. The Truk Stop is the only other hotel that might be suitable for divers, but it is a quarter mile downwind from an active landfill and adds ten minutes to each leg of your boat ride to most sites.

The island of Moen has almost nothing to see. I visited the Civil Action Team (CAT) House, a U.S. Air Force station that provides medical services and helps the Chuukese improve their infrastructure. Everyone from the commanding officer to the lowest ranking sergeant welcomed me. I drove a BLR rental car to explore the Japanese Lighthouse, which requires a moderate hike on basic trails, led by at least a dozen locals, many of whom gladly accept tips. Halfway up the trail, I paid \$5 and was led

Rinn Rules

Recently, a few subscribers have noted the stringent policies on the popular *M/V Spræ* & *M/V Fling* live-aboard boats that serve the Flower Garden Banks Marine Sanctuary and Stetson Bank. Freeport, Texas, a 90-minute drive from Houston, is their homeport.

We called Gary Rinn, company president, who told us that while he hasn't changed the rules since 1989, he has changed the sanctions — violators will stop diving for 24 hours.

In July, a member of an inattentive three buddy group lost a diver during ascent and the body was never found. Rinn said this was the only diver he has lost. This year, divers on his boats have had seven suspected DCS cases. After conducting routine computer checks at the suggestion of the local recompression chamber, his crew found that a surprising number of divers were lying about their dive profiles.

While historically Rinn's rule for divers who violated the 100-foot limit would be to sit out the next dive, he initially decided that violators could not dive for the rest of the trip. Finding this a bit Draconian, in August he softened it to "no more diving for 24 hours."

Prudent diver behavior is no small matter on the Rinn boats, as 4-5 dives can be done on some days as much as 100 miles from shore. If a diver develops DCS or even suspected DCS, either the boat must return to port, effectively ending the trip for other divers, or radio for the Coast Guard and a costly evacuation that the agency is often reluctant to perform.

Though the *Spræ* has a Nitrox membrane system, the crew will only provide Nitrox for Rinn's specially marked tanks. Cylinders belonging to the diver, including pony bottles, will only be filled with air. And, speaking of ponies, Rinn views them as for emergency purposes only. If a pony is tapped during a dive, they treat it as an out-of-air situation. The diver must sit out the next dive.

Rinn says they explain the policies to customers before

they leave port, but some people told us that the captain and crew's enforcement was so rigid — and even rude — that they would have not gone had they known about the autocratic approach to boat management. One reader on an August trip says she was not allowed to dive for the last three days because she hit 102 feet while assisting her buddy, a disabled diver.

If you're headed to join a Rinn boat, you can get the full skinny on their policies at www.rinnboats.com. And keep in mind, this is some of the best big-fish diving accessible from a US port, Draconian rules or not. Here's what reader Mike Giles (Lake Charles, LA), who's logged a thousand dives, says about his August trip aboard the *Spræ*

"The fully air-conditioned boats have Spartan yet clean and functional accommodations. Four hot meals were served per day. Snacks and fresh fruit with ice and beverages, 24 hours per day. The courteous crew was prepared and willing to provide information or assistance with dive gear in need of repair. Dive briefings were excellent and conducted by a divemaster who had just emerged from the water, providing up-to-the-minute information on visibility, currents and any unusual critters. A night dive was the highlight. Several silky sharks, lots of barracuda, two large green turtles, a large porcupine fish, spotted morays and spiny lobsters. The day dives (7 over two days) provided more sharks (including two whale sharks), lots of barracuda, two mantas, more green turtles, amberjacks and scores of the usual reef denizens. The weather was excellent with air in the low 90's and water in the mid 80's. All dives between 70 and 100 feet and, possible currents and open ocean entries and exits, so not for novices. In deep mid ocean you never know what will come drifting up over the reef. Good mixture of large and small subjects. Lack of current at the bottom made positioning easy. Large dedicated rinse tanks. 110 volt current available for recharging batteries and a television with hook-up available for viewing video."

All this and Texas too!

on "the path less traveled" to avoid being spotted by other families who might want to charge me, as well. The Lighthouse looked more impressive from a distance, without seeing all the graffiti. Some kids made me feel comfortable; others made me feel like an intruder. Ultimately, the spectacular panoramic views made it a worthwhile journey.

Most divers opt for one of the three live-aboards, the *Thorfinn*, *Aggressor*, or the *Odyssey*. Mason told me that more live-aboards have applied but the Chuukese government has said no. The *Thorfinn* was in sight all week, moving only the last day to drop off passengers to go to the airport. A 146-foot converted whaler powered by an enormous steam engine, it's rough around the edges, with winding passageways from one part of the ship to another. However, the stability and size make it well-suited for exploring outside the lagoon. It schedules annual cruises to Yap, and diving

Travel Insurance in a Time of Terrorism

Last June we published an article on travel insurance, in the wake of divers being kidnapped on Sipadan by Muslim terrorists and other incidents abroad. While the travel insurance policies may have undergone some revisions in the ensuing months, the thesis of the article is generally applicable and certainly timely. This is a synopsis of that piece.

Mixed in with memories of dive trips is an image of tropical paradise, and generally speaking, the image tends to be a peaceful one. Periodically the image of Utopia has been shattered by crime and terrorist threats, but none so singularly directed at divers as the recent attack on Sipadan, when Abu Sayyaf terrorists invaded the quiet island and took a score of vacationing divers hostage. However, increased security measures on Sipadan have allowed dive travel to continue.

Despite the Suva coup that has left Fiji's Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry a hostage, dive travel there reportedly hasn't skipped a beat, despite the State Department's request that U.S. citizens defer nonessential travel to the area. After an attempted coup in Honiara, the situation in the neighboring Solomon Islands is bloodier by far, with jungle fighting between ethnic groups reportedly leaving up to 100 dead. The State Department has issued a warning to U.S. citizens to defer travel to the Solomons.

Add to the formula the rapes, car hijackings, and armed robberies that plague Papua New Guinea's Port Moresby, bombings and grenade attacks in parks, museums, the airport in Manila, violence in the Philippine islands of Mindanao, Basilan, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Jolo, and continuing strife in parts of Indonesia, the sum total is definitely an inhospitable Pacific dive travel environment. Short of shying away from Pacific destinations altogether, what alternatives do divers have to protect their dive trip investment?

It seems like exactly the sorts of problems trip cancellation insurance was designed for, but look carefully before deciding that a trip cancellation policy will help you hold on to your hard-earned travel dollars. Most companies have strict requirements about the type of incidents covered under their policies, and often the unrest described above would not qualify for reimbursement.

Access America (800-729-6021; www.accessamerica.com),

CSA (800-873-9855; www.travelsecure.com), and TravelSafe (888-885-7233; www.travelsafe.com) differentiate between terrorist incidents and episodes of civil unrest, which include coups, riots, and uprisings. Surprisingly, isolated terrorist incidents, such as the Sipadan kidnapping, would be covered under their policies, while civil unrest would not. Most companies require that the event be unforeseen to qualify for coverage, which means that the destinations listed above, where civil unrest is ongoing, would not be covered. And, even if you have purchased insurance for a trip to an area that has had no prior disturbances and a problem subsequently develops that leads you to cancel the trip, there's no guarantee that the policy will reimburse you for trip costs. The decision of whether an "incident" qualifies as a terrorist one rests with the insurer.

Access America requires that a terrorist attack must have occurred within ten days of arrival to be covered, and the decision of whether an attack is a terrorist incident rests with its underwriters. Travel Guard (877-216-4885; www.travel-guard.com) covers for unforeseen events only (i.e., the policy must have been purchased before the initial event), and payment is made only if the State Department has issued a warning. CSA covers only cancellations due to events that have occurred within thirty days that its underwriters determine are terrorist incidents, while TravelSafe covers only cancellations due to unforeseen terrorist incidents in which the airline or other carrier refuses to make the trip.

How does all this stack up in terms of travel protection? If a band of armed guerrillas are guests at a resort, it's hardly reasonable to expect insured divers to make the trip a mere eleven days later. Making the criterion for a safe journey an airline's willingness to fly into a destination seems equally unfair. Touching down at the airport is one thing, but diving near a terrorist camp is another.

Obviously, trip insurance is no panacea. Nor is it a substitute for researching your destination beforehand. If you'd like to find out about problems ranging from terrorism to volcanic eruption anywhere on the globe, the State Department's website at <http://travel.state.gov> is a great place to start investigating. And, keep in mind this observation by reader Samuel Johnson from San Francisco, CA: "Read the fine print. The big print giveth, but the little print taketh away."

islands along the way that rarely see visitors. It has E-6 processing, video camera rentals, two camera tables on the main deck with 110/220V charging points, light tables, projector, TV/VCRs in the staterooms and the lounge, and e-mail/Internet access for passengers. The *Thorfinn* shuttles divers to wrecks on its four steel-hulled six-passenger chase boats (which don't have sun protection). With five dives scheduled daily, there's plenty of bottom time. Though no depth limits are imposed, divers are encouraged to stay out of decompression and to make extended safety stops starting at 60 feet. Hang tanks with regulators are available at the shallower stops. Nitrox up to 40 percent is available for shallower dives, or in ponies for off-gassing. Unlike other Truk live-aboards, one can book any number of days on the *Thorfinn*. One of my buddies aboard the *Thorfinn* last year said the dive operations had difficulty finding some wrecks, and dropped the group in the sand at 120 feet on one dive. The weekly rates on the *Thorfinn* are less than the *Odyssey* or *Aggressor*.

Touring the *Odyssey*, I found a top-notch operation led by husband-wife team Kara and Lenny (who formerly captained the *Truk Aggressor*). In Truk for two years, the *Odyssey* is a refitted 126-foot compact cruise ship with a luxury feel. Nine cabins with ensuite facilities are well laid out, and a spacious lounge, saloon, and part-shaded sun deck leave space to spread out. Video/photo facilities include daily E-6 processing, camera table, rinse tanks, slide table, charging station, and instruction. They usually move from wreck to wreck twice a day, with all divers on the same wreck at the same time, making two dives before moving on. Dives on the outer reefs are an option, with a shark-feeding dive available on group request. A single tender shuttles divers to and from shore, and makes occasional runs to other wrecks. A hang bar with tanks is used for safety stops. For an extra \$250/week, double 80's with isolation manifolds and ponies are available, as are Nitrox mixes of up to 80 percent for deco-stops (100 percent at extra charge). Contact them ahead of time to be certain you meet their equipment and certification requirements. A membrane system provides Nitrox at no charge for recreational divers, as well. The *Odyssey* is the only operation capable of supporting such depths with the benefit of multiple mixes for staged decompression and the benefit of higher O₂ mixes to reduce hang time.

The major reason to choose land over live-aboard in Chuuk is that land is less expensive. Based on prices published before September 11 and comparing apples to apples, the *Thorfinn* will be the least expensive live-aboard at \$2,195 for a week. The *Odyssey* is \$2,295 (add \$250 for technical diving upgrade) and *Truk Aggressor II* \$2,495 (\$200 less for a quad). These prices include Nitrox. A seven-night package at BLR with 12 dives is \$1,077, and for three tanks per day and two night dives it's \$1,457, then add another \$300 for meals. (Nitrox is not available.) While live-aboard phobic divers may prefer land, keep in mind that the live-aboards here don't face weathering storms that interrupt sleep and diving. Serious wreck divers will find the *Odyssey* the best choice ... and hope for an attitude adjustment aboard the *Aggressor*, now with a new Captain, Niall Lawlor.

-- D.H.



Diver's Compass: Peak time is January through March (the dry months), with April being the best diving month. August is the wettest month; November is typhoon season ... \$30 dive permit required; no waivers signed at BLD; some showed c-cards, others didn't ... Rental gear is fair, about ten sets of mostly Scubapro and Seaquest BCD'S and regulators (Mk-10/G-250s), but watch out if you're "Big." Same problem in sizing for limited wetsuits ... No on-land film developing. Come self-sufficient, because there is little in the way of useful parts and products for divers ... Frisbee golf course at BLR; kayaks available. Water 82-84; air mid 70's to low 90's; sun hot and shaded portions of skiff were welcome ... No amenities for video or photography ... \$10 extra for additional tanks used by doubles divers ... Air fills in the 2600-3000 range, with an occasional near-empty cylinder; got better

after divers complained ... Gray reef and blacktips on every other dive; lionfish on Kansho Maru always in the same spot. BLDS hung three weighted deco-lines, one with a cylinder and three regulators; visibility 30-80 feet, much less if you were in the rear of a procession ... Truk Stop Hotel, 691-330.4232/3, fax: 691-330-2286, www.trukstophotel.com; Truk Blue Lagoon Resort 800-367-5004, fax: 800-477-2329; SS Thorfinn, 691-330-3040, fax: 691-330-4253, www.thorfinn.net; Odyssey Adventures, www.trukodyssey.com, 800-757-5396 Sundance Tours & Dive Shop, 691-330-4234, fax: 691-330-4451; Truk Aggressor II 800-348-2628, www.aggressor.com. Recommended Reading: "Chuuk, A Traveler's Companion," \$4.95; "Hailstorm, The Dive Guide" (dive slates available for many wrecks), available only through author Klaus Lindemann, Suite 624, Ypsilanti, MI 48197; e-mail: hailstormx@aol.com ... Women are discouraged from going into public with exposed thighs and midsections.

Dive Travel in These Turbulent Times

random thoughts as we go to press

I, like you, have been deeply affected by the events on September 11 and the aftermath. They have touched everyone personally and tragically, and will remain with us throughout our lives.

By now, each of us has thought about what it means personally and what our lives will be like in the future. For us divers, our travel is no doubt affected. While some of my friends have continued with their travel plans, many have postponed. Others have stopped planning. They just don't want to leave home.

Besides the lessened desire to travel, economic concerns are widespread. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost jobs, an uncountable number of others are worried, and everyone's wealth, big or small, has shrunk.

Many dive operators are suffering, not only from cancellations, but from a rapid drop in future bookings. Those in the Red Sea, Indonesia and other potential trouble spots may suffer the most. Others that are heavily financed or otherwise marginal will close their doors, victims of the attacks thousands of miles from their shores.

Travelers are avoiding countries with a large Muslim population such

as Indonesia (as I write this, some hotels have been visited by radicals looking for Americans to threaten). Egypt and Israel are high on the list of countries to avoid.

But, while the chances that I'll get harmed may be a tad greater than they've been, they don't worry me. Terrorists have threatened travelers as long as I've been island hopping. And, just eighteen months ago divers were kidnapped in Sipadan, spirited away to the Phillipines and held hostage. In mid-September, a marine biologist and diver was kidnapped in the Philippines, escaping a short time later. And, reportedly boats with European divers reportedly have been accosted by pirates in the Indian Ocean. Still, I see my chances of being caught up in this as negligible (with the caveat that as I write, America has made no response to the terrorists).

In fact, the normal risks of international travel are greater than what bin Laden's gang will cook up for me. Some planes I've been on in third world countries were barely air-worthy and, I suspect, that would apply to some of the pilots. A couple of tourists were murdered within months of each other in Bonaire a decade ago, and today, cars are rou-

tinely rifled. So what? The towns of Papua New Guinea are often compared with the Old West because of the "rascals." Last year locals visited Loloata resort and, at gunpoint, cleaned out the guests. Dive boats can sink, which is what happened earlier this year to the *Scuba Catin* Kauai (leaving a dozen divers in the water to be rescued) and a Cozumel boat, that left our writer Doc Vikingo and others with a two-mile swim to shore.

For the moment, I am going to believe that as a traveler, I'm as safe as ever, as long as I select my destinations wisely and keep my eyes open. But, where can we travel safely? Do we select destinations with a strong American or "Western" presence, such as Micronesia, the Virgin Islands, or Australia? Shall we stay in the Caribbean and Central America or venture off to Fiji (where someone burned down a Muslim temple)? Do we stay close to home, tip-toeing to Florida, Baja, California, or the Flower Gardens of Texas? Do we worry about live-aboards because they're an easy mark for terrorists at sea?

Actually, I'd feel safe at any of these venues, including live-aboards, as long as they were outside poten-