

# undercurrent

*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

August 2010

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## Plantation Beach Resort, Honduras

*diving on the quiet side of the Bay Islands, in Cayos Cochinos*

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Dear Fellow Diver:

I was in a bad mood. Delta had fumbled the luggage transfer at its Atlanta hub but even worse, I was on my short connector flight to La Ceiba, Honduras, in pouring rain and blustery northerly winds. That was the layover point for the next morning's 15-mile boat trip to Cayo Grande, the largest island in the Cayos Cochinos (Hog Islands) archipelago. My mood meter dropped even farther when Plantation Beach Resort manager Roger Remington, who met me and my partner at the bar of La Ceiba's Gran Paris Hotel, gave me his weather report. "I don't like the looks of it," he said.

That's the peril of December-January travel to Honduras' Bay Islands (Cayos Cochinos are tucked in between them and the country's northern coast). But the next morning, the rain petered out and the wind turned. As we departed in a big panga from the beach in the nearby village of Sambo Creek, a pod of dolphins surrounded us in the surf zone. The panga captain called it the welcoming committee, and it was a mood changer.

Plantation Beach Resort (PBR) is just 25 miles from Roatán but a world apart. You won't find a cruise ship, a disco or even a gift shop. Only a few divers and touring yachties stop off at the only hotel on the postcard-perfect jungly island. Cayo Grande has a few hundred residents and some scattered vacation homes, but you'll be mostly isolated, unless you take a walk over the hill to the village. Mainly, you'll be surrounded by natural beauty overlooking the Caribbean and healthier reefs than the nearby islands. This is no fancy resort: not a lawn in sight



The Main Lodge at Plantation Beach Resort



and the only TV was never on. I almost expected to see Mary Ann and the Professor coming up the stone walkway. (My apologies if you don't remember *Gilligan's Island*.)

An hour after settling into my hillside cabaña, I, my buddy and our guide were cruising around a coral head at Lion's Head when we came upon a hawksbill turtle. I laughed out loud. A pesky damselfish was pecking the big guy on the nose! These days, you have to look for those kinds of scenes to add excitement to dives because as we well-traveled divers know, most creatures throughout the Caribbean that can serve as

human food are hooked and cooked long before maturity. But there was plenty of good macro stuff to keep me interested. I found three species of shrimp and a pretty spotted lobster. I eased my finger up to a corkscrew anemone to get it cleaned by a Pederson shrimp but the little critter ignored it. The divemaster tried to show me how it's done, but all he got was a noisy crackle from a hidden snapping shrimp. A couple of swim-throughs later -- one filled with glassy sweepers -- I wandered off the low wall to the sand flats, enjoying the yellow goatfish, garden eels and a tiny-eyed flounder. My buddy pointed to a mound of sand erupting like a miniature volcano; it was a southern lugworm blowing out excreted sand. After 60 minutes, I hung at 15 feet, watching a small barracuda herd creole wrasse over the dead elkhorn coral.

The routine is two dives in the morning, with an hour interval spent on the 42-foot dive boat, and an afternoon dive at 2 p.m. The boat is tied to moorings for most dives, adding an occasional drift dive. There are racks for 44 tanks but captain Danny Chacon told me there rarely are more than 10 divers. The dive platform has a big ladder. Crew provides towels and drinking water, and there is a DAN O2 kit on board. No working head and no rinse tank unless you bring a camera on board. The staff loaded our equipment each morning, and rinsed and locked it in the dockside storage room each evening. Air fills were 2,700 to 3,000 psi.

Danny, having worked at PBR for many years, knows the reefs well. Mike Wall, the new lead divemaster, previously worked in Roatán (as has Robin Brigham, the other divemaster) and in the Indo-Pacific. What he lacks in experience he makes up for in enthusiasm. There was no time limit imposed, and most dives lasted about an hour, when I ran low on air. (Nitrox isn't offered.)

The 10-room resort is tucked into a forested creek valley on a cove on Cayo Grande. Some rooms are next to the creek, and a few cabañas are spread along a hillside walkway. Social life is centered in the main lodge, overlooking a small beach and the boat dock. The lodge includes a long room with tables for eating and telling little diver lies, a bar, and a small library with three Paul Humann ID books. Satellite Wi-Fi allows you to surf the net (staff allowed me to use their computer and even borrow a cell phone for a couple of calls to the mainland). But most fun was chatting with an interesting mix of guests; conversation might include English with various accents, Spanish, Portuguese and German. PBR staff stopped by to deal with logistics, or to tell tall ones about wildlife and wilder guests they've seen. (I heard more about Cameron Diaz than I wanted to know.)

I made three of my 14 dives along Pelican Wall, near the resort's front yard. At Pelican 3, I descended to 85 feet to find longsnout butterflies and blackcap basslets, then eased slowly along and up, checking out the grottos and ledges. I followed a large schoolmaster into a crevice and found a five-foot barracuda,



The View From The Author's Cabana

blackened and nose-down, getting car-wash treatment from cleaning gobies. Meanwhile, my partner, scouting the small stuff, pointed out giant tunicates, tube tunicates and a variety of anemones and corallimorphs. Mike, who immediately adapted to my slow, poke-around style, found sea slugs and other critters so small that I needed my magnifier to ID them. He pointed at a spectacular five-inch fish with an ostentatious dorsal fin posed on a tiny ledge -- a male quillfin blenny. Tucked in the sand between coral heads was an unusually large, bright green sea cucumber. I turned around to return to the mooring near the top of the reef at 30 feet, enjoying some healthy coral cover here. A school of brown chromis spilled around a pinnacle, with a cowfish trailing them.

At a site called Hospital, I cruised over the shallows and down to 80 feet for a wall tour, including a hawksbill moving overhead, a couple of big scorpionfish, a large-eye toadfish (seen on a number of dives) and a spotted moray. Nearby, several arrow blennies stood guard at a little nook. Back up in the shallows, lit by bright sun, I watched red band parrots in a spawning rush, then a couple of wrasses did a prolonged, open-jaw face-off, their macho version of territorial shadow-boxing. Mike found a leopard flatworm. Near the mooring, I saw an octopus in the open, shooting black ink clouds for no reason I could determine. It finally pressed itself against coral, changing into camo coloration. I wanted to ask it why it was so upset.

Cayos Cochinos has been a protected preserve since 1993 -- with just local hook-and-line fishing -- so the fish life is better than at the bigger Bay Islands. Still, like everywhere in the Caribbean, the reefs are noticeably stressed. I asked Roger, who started at PBR some 15 years ago as a divemaster and has been the manager for several years, why some sites seem relatively healthy and others have heavy algae cover. He pointed out that the healthy reefs are near Cayo Grande (where PBR is located) and some of the smaller cays, and the more stressed reefs are near Cayo Menor, the sister island a couple of miles away. There was a five-year hiatus on diving the Menor sites as part of an ongoing study but it was found that the lack of diving pressure had no effect. The difference remains unexplained. Roger noted that after the five-year period there was some trash on the reefs at Menor because divers weren't there to pick it up.

The healthiest -- and most exciting -- sites are the nearby sea mounts. To my disappointment, they were not reachable during my January trip due to bumpy seas, which lowered visibility to 50 feet and limited some site selections. On an earlier trip to PBR 13 years ago, I made nearly half my dives on the sea mounts and found more pelagics, more schools and more electric diving. I would recommend spring or summer as the better dive seasons here, to dodge the rain (and mainland run-off) and to increase the odds of diving the banks in calm water.

The resort itself has changed little over the years. There are a couple of newer cabañas, rooms 10 and 12, which I would definitely recommend. Some rooms are spread out but others are close to the lodge. They are plain but spacious and airy, with 24-hour electricity, overhead fan, hot-water shower and a resident gecko. The



**Making Friends With a Hawksbill Turtle**

## Plantation Beach Resort, Honduras

Diving ( <i>experienced</i> )	★★★★
Diving ( <i>beginner</i> )	★★★★
Snorkeling	★★★★
Accommodations	★★★
Food	★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★1/2

★ = poor      ★★★★★ = excellent  
Caribbean Scale

## Dive Kararu and the *Seahorse* Break Ties, Exchange Words, Offer Deals

For many years, Kararu Dive Voyages has been the booking agent for Indonesian diving aboard the *MSY Seahorse*. But in their recent Internet newsletters, the two announced their separation, each with acrimony.

Kararu wrote, "Due to severe contractual breaches from PT. Indo Cruises, the owner of the *Seahorse*, combined with ongoing maintenance issues with the vessel itself, Kararu has had no choice but to cancel our management contract with the *Seahorse* ... we have no further dealings with [it] whatsoever." The *Seahorse's* written response: "As a result of the termination of the agreement between the *Seahorse* and Kararu, we have seen some comments written in a newsletter that give the impression we are having 'maintenance issues.' Nothing could be further from the truth. . . Anyone who has sailed with us will back up the quality and service of our operation over the past three years."

It's the Internet version of awkwardly sitting at the dinner table of a married couple and watching them squabble bitterly.

We contacted both Dive Kararu and the *Seahorse*. Stein Zahl, Kararu's managing director, was tight-lipped. "The owner of the *Seahorse* repeatedly breached his contract with

us, and the only sensible thing to do was to terminate the contract with immediate effect."

*Seahorse* owner Txus Reiriz said, "Too many disappointing things happened since the beginning." One problem was Kararu announced it would start using the *Seahorse* for its own charters, which, says Reiriz, was news to him. "We never gave away the management or operation of the *Seahorse* but [planned] to sell our own dives, in collaboration with Kararu. Before this, the *Seahorse* was the best liveaboard vessel. Now they're sending newsletters trying to damage her reputation and our clients are asking what was going on. So we decided to publish our newsletter announcing the end of the agreement."

The split does have a silver lining for divers bound for Indonesia. Single divers who had had to share or pay a premium for single occupancy can now book one of the six new single cabins on the *Cheng Ho*, or the *Sea Safari VII*, which Kararu is using for Raja Ampat cruises. And the *Seahorse* is offering divers who were booked "by those now spreading bad news about us" a 50 percent discount for 2010 and 2011 cruises. Reiriz says any previously booked diver who experiences inconvenient maintenance issues on board will get a total refund.

new ones have a great view from their terraces. Don't expect maintenance standards of the Cancún El Presidente -- our roof leaked during a heavy downpour but we were quickly moved to a room next door.

In addition to the Caribbean Three-Rs -- rum, romance and relaxation -- activities include hiking, kayaking, snorkeling or watching the birds outside my front door. A nice walk leads up along the creek to the island's 500-foot-high point and a light-house view of all the surrounding islands. If you pass local folks, you may hear some Garifuna language as well as Spanish. A PBR staffer helped me find a pink boa constrictor in a tree a short way down the trail; he seemed to know which branches those snakes favor. It's a subspecies endemic to the island, and the subject of one of my nicest topside photos. I found the PBR staff competent and helpful. When my luggage was lost, they loaned me a shortie, BC and fins, and arranged almost free delivery of my luggage to the island by taxi and then on the next boat coming over.

Each meal is served as a plentiful buffet and is pretty good for a remote place. Compliments to the kitchen staff led to smiles and discussions of tomorrow's possibilities. There's no menu but you can make your requests by email before you arrive. I requested fresh fish and local dishes (called "tipico" in Honduras), and after some initial complaining, got it. Breakfasts always included fresh fruit and eggs, with pancakes or thick Central American tortillas, and usually bacon. Good coffee was available early. Lunches usually included red beans and rice, with meat or fish, a couple of times with fried green plantains. Dinners were similar. Lunch ends with cookies, dinner with homemade cake or pie. The small bar had plenty of liquor and Honduran beer but don't expect any fancy drinks. In fact, guests often just pull beer from the cooler and mark their own tabs. Potable water is always available, including in the rooms. There were usually a couple other guests from the U.S., Canada or Honduras visiting at dinner and talking over Salva Vida beers. Roger says January is a slow month. If there were a dozen guests and half of them were on the dive boat, the place would have a livelier feel.

Snorkeling is decent in the turtle grass and in-shore corals right off the resort dock but you can do better with a walk or kayak nearby, especially near Pelican Point, in-shore of the *Bay Islands Aggressor* mooring. You can also make shore dives at night, though Pelican Wall makes a better night dive.

It's hard to get from the U.S. to the island in a day, so PBR arranges a hotel stay in La Ceiba. You can use it as more than a layover: La Ceiba is the gateway to some great day-excursions in the rain forest, incredible birding, monkeys and crocs, or a couple hours of whitewater rafting on the nearby Congrejal River. On this trip, I spent four days in the area with an excellent naturalist guide. A boat tour of the Cuero y Salado wetlands provided outstanding birding and close-up howler monkey troops. Another day, I enjoyed a rainforest hike to a 300-foot waterfall in Pico Bonito National Park. And I met nice people everywhere in Honduras; the few times I approached a stranger and asked to use their cell phone, I was never turned down.

If you like getting off diving's interstates for the less-traveled roads, Plantation Beach Resort might be worth looking at. It's good diving, a comfortable, laid-back environment and very easy on the budget.

-- M.A.



**Diver's Compass:** I paid \$625, double occupancy, (\$540 plus 16 percent tax) for five days of diving, hotel and all-inclusive meals; this is 10 percent off the rack rate, which I requested by email . . . Extras: \$80 for the round-trip boat trip from La Ceiba, \$10 park fee, the bar bill (beer is \$3) and tips for the boat and hotel staff . . . In La Ceiba, I stayed at Gran Paris in the center of town and paid \$43 for a nice double room; PBR can get you 20 percent off . . . To take land excursions near La Ceiba, contact La Moskitia Ecoaventuras, run by Jorge Salaverri, an excellent, bilingual naturalist guide, at [www.lamoskitia.hn](http://www.lamoskitia.hn) . . . Most international flights are to San Pedro Sula, then take a short plane hop on Isleña (\$60 each way) to La Ceiba or a three-hour van or bus ride . . . Website: [www.plantationbeachresort.com](http://www.plantationbeachresort.com)

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## Thailand, Cocos, Hawaii, Maldives...

### *Thai tech dives, an easy wreck dive and El Niño's ups and downs*

**Technical Diving in Thailand Aboard the *MV Trident*.** Here's an operation just for technical divers, as J.W. Hinson (Bay City, TX) reports from his April trip. "I began planning 18 months ago for the goal of diving several wrecks, including the *USS Lagarto*, the last U.S. submarine lost in WWII, and the Japanese *Tottori Maru*, a "hellship" that carried 2,000 American POWs from the Philippines to Japan. One of the POWs was my father, who was captured in April 1942. This was a technical dive trip with depths in the 250-foot range. The *Trident* is a basic, no-frills dive boat with an outstanding crew. Peter, Miko, Wilco, Sonia and Crystal went out of their way to provide the best tech diving possible. A typical day included two dives with 18/45 bottom mix and 40- and 100-percent deco gases. A deco bar is available with surface-supplied oxygen for final deco. Typical dive profiles were 15 to 25 minutes of bottom time. Rebreathers are also supported. A chase boat is available in case a diver loses the up line. A thermocline above the wrecks reduces the visibility to 25 feet. It's a one-hour flight from Bangkok to Koh Samui, where we met the boat. If you're a technical diver looking for new wreck sites, check into this." ([www.techthailand.com](http://www.techthailand.com))

**Cocos Island, Costa Rica and El Niño.** This is El Niño season and historically divers have found that when warmer currents appear, the big fish go deep and sometimes disappear altogether for divers. But as two of our correspondents told us, it's all in the luck of the draw. Max Weinmann (Wayland, MA) was aboard the *Undersea Hunter*

## Are Vegetarians More at Risk for DCS?

A study by two Dutch medical researchers published in the May/June issue of the *Underwater Hyperbaric Medical Journal* is significant for vegetarian divers.

A 36-year-old male dive instructor made one dive for 60 minutes to 60 feet, sat out for two hours, then made a second dive for 52 minutes to a maximum depth of 70 feet. His dive computer gave a decompression stop for eight minutes at 10 feet, which he did. Forty-five minutes after the dive, he noticed tingling in his feet and his left hand, weakness in both legs, pain in his left elbow and a general tiredness. He hydrated by drinking 500 mL of water and during the six-hour transfer to the hyperbaric chamber, he breathed 100 percent oxygen. Upon arrival, he was treated in the chamber and had several subsequent sessions. While his symptoms gradually lessened, in between there was a relapse of his sensory symptoms and weakness of his lower legs. This persisted after the last treatment.

On the fourth day of the treatment, researchers learned he was a vegetarian and diagnosed him with macrocytic anemia. They administered cyanocobalamin intramuscularly and put him on a three-month protocol. Within four weeks, he recovered and resumed diving after six months. He was advised to take multivitamin tablets with B12 on a daily basis. The researchers concluded that the diver had DCS initially and was especially at risk because of a vulnerable spinal cord due to a long-lasting deficiency of vitamin B-12. They also believe some of the symptoms in the post-treatment period were manifestations of a B12 deficiency enhanced by DCS.

The researchers noted that although vegetables are generally devoid of vitamin B12, strict vegetarians almost never develop a clinical deficiency, as only five milligrams of vitamin B12 are needed daily and an adequate amount is available in legumes. However, Vitamin B12 deficiency affects the spinal cord, brain, optic nerves and peripheral nerves. The onset of manifestations is gradual over months. The spinal cord is usually affected first and often exclusively. Patients first notice general weakness and paresthesias consisting of tingling, a “pins and needles” feeling and other vaguely described sensations. As the illness progresses, the gait becomes unsteady and stiffness and weakness of the limbs develops, especially in the legs.

The researchers “do not believe that vegetarians in general are at risk for DCS but they should be aware of their nutritional status, particularly regarding vitamin B12.”

*“Decompression Sickness in a Vegetarian Diver: Are Vegetarian Divers at Risk? A Case Report”, by Robert A. Van Hulst and Wim Van Der Kamp, Undersea and Hyperbaric Medical Journal, Vol. 37, No. 3, pages 181-184*

in early June (with water temperatures from 77 to 82 degrees) and reports that aboard the boat, he was “regaled with stories of tiger sharks, schooling hammerheads and other tales of wonderment and big animal encounters. Sadly, it was not to happen for the entire trip. I realize one has no control over nature, but it just happened that the El Niño was not in our favor. Isolated hammerheads and Galapagos sharks were witnessed but not the schooling masses we had so hoped for. Most of us understood and made the best of it with levity and humor. Currents were extremely strong, leaving many of us exhausted merely to reach a handhold on the reef below. We would be straining our eyes, only imagining shadows somewhere off in the distance, despite the divemaster’s insistence that there were hammers ‘just out of view’. Re-entering the boat was often a challenge amidst the chop and swells accompanying the cooler weather, but the single driver on board was skilled in helping us up and finding us despite our surfacing at a distance or in the rain. This site is clearly only for the very skilled and fit. Currents may shift and change and toss divers effortlessly about. The potential for injury is very real. In fact, one diver developed decompression sickness and was sucking down 100 percent oxygen once it was evident why he was not well. Despite advice to stop diving from the physician on board, he decided to continue after a short break. Even if a doctor is on board, facilities are very basic and inadequate for anything beyond scrapes and bruises. If there is a serious injury, the boat must turn around and head back to the mainland – another 36 hours away . . . We were informed early on that the water filtration system might emit a sulfurous odor, so cabin doors should be kept open. Sure enough, the cabin area smelled like an unattended men’s room in summer, very unpleasant. . . . Upon our return, the crew quickly dissolved into the background once tips were given. No one from management appeared despite the DCS incident during the

trip, which left us dismayed and curious. . . . Perhaps of equal concern was the fact that their subsequent dive blog seemed to remark on a different trip altogether. If more than one hammerhead was seen, then the blog described it as "... the largest schools of hammerheads were seen at . . ." There were other examples of exaggeration which would only serve to entice prospective divers, much as we had been enticed."

A month later, long-term *Undercurrent* correspondent David Shem-Tov (London, U.K.) was aboard the *Sea Hunter*, sister vessel of the *Undersea Hunter*. "The 12-night charter was my fourth to Cocos. The decision to join this trip was made with some trepidation, given reports on El Niño conditions affecting sightings of pelagics. Interestingly, our logbooks indicated similar water temperatures (77 to 81 degrees) as on other trips. Perhaps the thermoclines were lower this July. The hammerheads were there but a little deeper than I remembered. Most dives were outstanding. I spent at least 20 minutes in the company of dolphins harassing a school of jacks. We rescued a turtle caught in fishing lines, and a whale shark made a brief appearance. There were a couple of the signature 'wallpaper' sightings with the schools of hammerheads overhead. We saw eagle rays, Galapagos, graytips and a manta or two. We didn't encounter the tiger sharks, though. . . . Boat facilities were excellent, as always. My companion thought the food was better this time. Unlike previous trips, fishing boats seeking shark fins were not visible. The rangers had two operating boats and were using them. It's about time. Sadly, it appears they are too late for the silvertips. Divemasters told us they haven't seen them for two years. . . . One concern is the number of dive boats now operating here. For many years, only three boats would come here and on many days, ours was the only boat around. Now with the *Argo*, *Adventure*, *Wind Dancer* and *Yemaya*, there are seven. Considering that everyone wants to always dive on Dirty Rock or Alcione (with Punta Maria and Dos Amigos often inaccessible due to ocean conditions), the pressure on the best dive sites is going to be tremendous." ([www.underseahunter.com](http://www.underseahunter.com))

**Kona Coast, Hawaii.** I've always thought the Kona Coast got a bit of a bad rap by divers, because the unique colorful tropics against the stark backdrop can be stunning. Dan Clemens (Everett, WA) says to find good diving, get away from Kailua. "Blue Wilderness is one of the best operators, especially if you are staying in the Waikoloa area. It is in Queen's Marketplace and launches its boat a few miles north at Paniao. I found the coral, fish and invertebrates much better in this area than at the Kailua dive locations. At one point, I was diving lava tubes with whales 'talking' 100 yards away. The tubes amplified the sound and it was magical. I also was able to get a good shot of a devil scorpionfish. Turtle cleaning stations, lots to see, good operation. ([www.divebluewilderness.com](http://www.divebluewilderness.com))

## How Divers Can Help the Florida Keys

A few readers have asked us, "What can we do to help in the Gulf of Mexico?" While your passion to help may be strong, it's not like you can don a wetsuit and dive into the oil slick to save the marine life. Before volunteering for clean-up efforts, you need to learn how to protect yourself from the oil first by taking a hazmat course.

But recreational divers can become "citizen scientists" for a few days and help replant broken coral and grow new ones near Key Largo. Amoray Dive Resort is hosting dives that let you help marine scientists with coral restoration on August 11-13, October 19-22 and November 1-3.

Ken Nedimyer, president of the Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF), will lead the education lectures and the dives. Class sessions precede dive trips and focus on corals' health, their function in marine ecosystems, natural and manmade threats, and the means to protect them in the

Florida Keys. Then after a trip to CRF's nursery in Key Largo to clean and prepare elkhorn and staghorn corals, divers make the working dives to plant them.

At the nursery, corals are started from a clipping about the length of a knuckle, and grow to 30 or 40 centimeters. After a year on the reef, corals grow several inches tall with multiple branches, and in five years they are strong, independent structures that can play host to fish. In August 2009, the first cultured corals were discovered spawning after only two years – the first time that had been observed in the wild. An extra benefit of the coral restoration dives is they're timed to correspond with the annual coral spawn.

"The goal is to get them to reproduce successfully so the corals that have spawned here can settle 10 miles or 50 miles from here," Nedimyer said. "What we're trying to do is put the girls and the boys back together in the same room so that they'll make babies."

Contact Amoray Dive Resort about the dive program and discounted stay-and-dive packages at 800-426-6729.

## *Sharks Up Close*

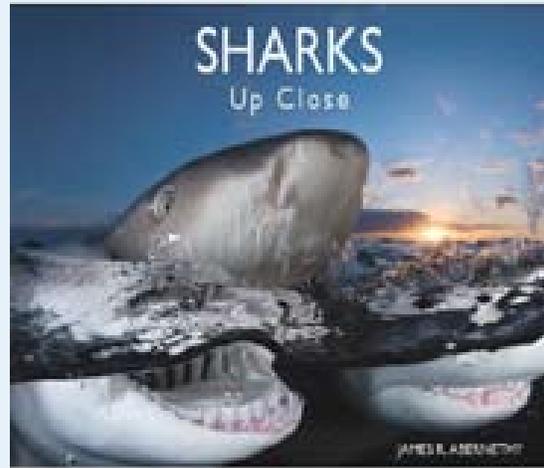
Jim Abernethy makes a living with his Scuba Adventures shark dives in the Bahamas by baiting and chumming sharks to get them up close to his diving clients. While some deplore his techniques (one of his tourist divers died from a shark bite in 2008), he has done an admirable job as a shark-saving advocate. Abernethy's latest effort is *Sharks Up Close*, featuring his excellent photography and detailed data about sharks' biology and their significance in the food chain.

Abernethy wants his book to be a staple of marine education programs in schools. The language is simple and there are sentences like "From their awesome rack of teeth to their fascinating behaviors, sharks are COOL!" but you may pick up a few shark facts you didn't know before, like the purposes of the slits behind their eyes and the dots on their snouts. In addition, anyone will be impressed by the many up-close, face-to-snout photos Abernethy took of sharks on his Bahamas dives.

It may not be an addition to your own dive library, but buy it for that youngster you're trying to get interested in scuba diving and ocean conservation. As Abernethy wrote

in our review copy of his book, "As the saying goes, 'Out of sight, out of mind.' It is up to those of us who visit this underwater world to show the beauty of it as well as what is happening to it so we can all work together to protect it."

Color photos are on each of the 81 pages. The hard-cover version is \$25, the paperback is \$20. Click on the book cover posted on [www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org) to buy via Amazon.com, and we'll get a cut of the proceeds to continue our reef-protection efforts.



David A. Brom (Benicia, CA) went out with Mauna Lani Sea Adventures. "My wife and I have been all over the world and were surprised at the quality of diving. The water was cold and there is no soft coral but the hard coral makes up for it. There were lots of tropicals, many found only in Hawaii, and turtles everywhere. We had a manta on one dive at the 15th Hole. The Kohala coast (northwest side of Kona) is the place to dive. Dive sites are close, two to 15 minutes away. Depths are shallow, averaging 40 feet, so air consumption is not an issue. Gary, the dive-master, has been diving here for 30 years and knows his stuff. He is old school and touches pretty much everything. This bothered me but who am I to tell a guy who has been diving here 30 years to lay off the coral? He did point out stuff I would have never seen and if I missed it, he would bring it to me (octopus, pincushion sea star, etc.)." ([www.hawaiiiseadventures.com](http://www.hawaiiiseadventures.com))

**The Maldives.** The *MV Orion*, launched just last year, bills itself as pure luxury, but Joe Trapasso (San Francisco, CA) led a group of 23 in May and came away disappointed. Dysfunctional air conditioning meant, "Several divers slept on deck due to the oppressive heat in their rooms. Our dives were average, other than the middle dive on the last day. We understand we were coming at a different season but our impression was they just do not know the Maldives dive sites and waters, as many dives did not match the briefings. One reason we signed on was for dive-master Hassan's local experience (15,000-plus dives in the Maldives) yet he was not on the boat. We didn't go very far beyond Male. Lack of communication -- zero from the captain to the group, and no communication from the dive-masters -- they never even spoke to their groups." While we don't have other reports on the *Orion*, if you're considering this new craft, do your research.

For example, consider the venerable *Manthiri*. Curt Andrus (Lewisville, TX), there in April, writes: "Icelandic volcano and air traffic groundings in Europe prevented two divers from joining, so we only had five divers on the charter. Good diving experience and personalized attention. Overall, good fish life and reefscape. A manta cleaning station had a couple mantas circling for 30-plus minutes. Plenty of black-tip, white-tip and grey reef sharks on numerous dive sites. One whale shark sighting that allowed snorkeling for 20 minutes. Couple of pods of dolphins in transit but none that hung around the boat. Food was abundant -- chicken, fish, lamb and beef. The local Maldivian curry

was very good (and hot) but not on the menu. Only after we saw the crew eating it and asking what it was did they make enough for the guests. Rooms were adequately sized and had good storage for clothes and luggage. Separate ensuite bathrooms were large and worked without issue. The A/C was good and controllable within the room. Divemasters and crew had a lot of tenure on the *Manthiri*, so they must have a good owner. Also plenty of repeat guests.” ([www.manthiriliveaboard.com](http://www.manthiriliveaboard.com); it’s booked by Jenny Collister at [www.reefandrainingforest.com](http://www.reefandrainingforest.com))

**S.S. Yongala, Queensland, Australia.** Perhaps the fishiest wreck in the world, it’s a favorite among divers. Many presume it’s only reachable by liveaboard. Not true, reports Mike Cavanaugh (Bellaire, TX). “Yongala Divers runs an operation about 90 minutes south of Townsville. The dive shop is friendly and accommodating. Nitrox is available. The drill is to load your gear on a Zodiac on a trailer, which is pulled by tractor to the beach. The run is 30 minutes to the wreck. The dive is a two-tank dive with maximum depth first (you can’t go past the bottom at 90 feet) and the second dive is across the top of the wreck at 60 feet. The *Yongala* is protected in a green zone, and I have never seen so many fish schooling in all my diving. We saw many sea snakes, turtles, giant groupers, cobia and typical reef fish. Coral growth on the wreck was impressive. No wreck penetration allowed. The first day, I dove with 12 divers (crowded on the Zodiac), the second day there was only six divers (just right for a Zodiac). Upon return, the dive shop provided a BBQ feed. This is a definite must-do dive.” ([www.yongaladive.com.au](http://www.yongaladive.com.au))

-- Ben Davison

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## Court Rules Dive Release is “Too Specific”

### *how this could change the dive shop’s liability release you sign*

In May 2010, the California Second Court of Appeal (DCA) ruled that the liability release used by the dive shop Scuba Luv on Catalina Island did not apply to a wrongful death lawsuit filed against it by the family of Raffi Huverserian. That reversed a Los Angeles Superior Court judge’s decision to grant Scuba Luv summary judgment based on the release.

In March 2005, Huverserian, 45, rented dive gear from Scuba Luv, signing a rental agreement that contained a liability release. He and his 17-year-old son dove at Casino Point with the rented gear. At 60 feet, Huverserian ran out of air, made a controlled ascent sharing his son’s air, then went into cardiac arrest on the beach. He died the next day at UCLA Medical Center. The Los Angeles County Coroner’s report states death was probably due to an air embolism.

Huverserian’s family filed a wrongful death lawsuit, contending the rented pressure gauge read inaccurately high, Scuba Luv did not completely fill his tank and rented him excessive weights. However, the coroner’s office reportedly hired an experienced scuba equipment specialist who tested the rented equipment and found no defects.

As often happens in lawsuits involving a recreational activity release, Scuba Luv filed a summary judgment motion seeking to short-circuit the suit before trial (see my two-part article “Divers, Sign Your Life Away” in the August and September 2008 issues of *Undercurrent* regarding release-based summary judgment motions). The trial court found the release applied to Huverserian’s death, granted the motion and dismissed the case. The family appealed and the DCA reversed the trial court’s dismissal. The case will now return to the trial court, where Scuba Luv will face trial unless it settles the case or finds some other basis for a summary judgment motion. Scuba Luv could also ask the California Supreme Court to review the DCA’s decision. But the chances the Supreme Court would grant a discretionary review here are slim to none.

Scuba Luv’s release failed because the DCA found its introductory language was, ironically, too specific. This language, in boldface and underline, read: “Equipment rental agreement, liability release and assumption of risk of scuba & snorkel gear for boat dives or multiple day rentals.” Following this, in unemphasized print, was broader

language covering injury, death or other damages from the rental or use of Scuba Luv's equipment or from product defect or negligence.

The DCA interpreted the "boat dives or multiple day rentals" to be part of the release, and to limit injury or deaths to those resulting from boat dives or multiple day rentals. It followed that because Huverserian's death arose from neither a boat dive nor a multiple day rental, the release did not apply to his death. The DCA rejected Scuba Luv's contention that the "boat dives or multiple day rentals" language was a mere caption and not part of the operative release language. Readers wanting to read the DCA's published opinion in its entirety can find it at [www.courtinfo.ca.gov/opinions/documents/B212823.PDF](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/opinions/documents/B212823.PDF)

The Huverserian DCA opinion will probably benefit more dive operators and insurers than it will divers. Operators aware of this latest appeals court pronouncement on dive releases may now review their releases to be sure they have not inadvertently hobbled the release's scope with restrictive language. The Huverserian ruling offers operators a signpost by citing approvingly the seminal dive release case *Madison v. Superior*, observing that the release in question lacked the "qualifying language" found in Scuba Luv's release.

For divers, the Huverserian opinion may encourage trial and appeals courts to look harder for any flaws or ambiguities in a release allowing an interpretation that rescues the diver from summary judgment execution. Case law is replete with statements that a recreational release must be "clear, unambiguous and explicit." But with that said, dive and other recreational activity releases simply don't suffer the degree of scrutiny that courts have long given insurance policies, and increasingly are now giving contract language mandating arbitration. So any diver contemplating a dive injury lawsuit based on a claim of negligence (which, when the wheat is separated from the chaff, is what most dive lawsuits boil down to) should recognize his chances of ever reaching a jury will frequently depend on skirting the defendant's liability release.

*Larry Schnabel is a member of the California State Bar and is Of Counsel to the law firm Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP, headquartered in Los Angeles. He is also a NAUI certified divemaster*

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## Fair for Photographers?

### *NAUI wants all rights to your work, free of charge*

Underwater photographers are abuzz about NAUI's recent "Just Dive" photo contest, but not for the reasons you would expect. Photographer Mike Boom from Oakland, CA, told us why. "NAUI owns outright any image submitted to them for the contest, whether the image wins or not."

In the contest's website ([www.naui.org/justdive.aspx](http://www.naui.org/justdive.aspx)) the sixth paragraph reads: "Submitting photos constitutes an agreement that the ownership of [sic] transfers to . . . and may be published by NAUI in any media without further compensation. By entering, you give NAUI the perpetual, exclusive rights to use the photo in any way, including but not limited to advertising and promotional use . . . No obligations, financial or otherwise, accrue to the previous owner/submitter of the photo(s) or the people in the photo(s)."

Says Boom, "It's an old scheme used by organizations too cheap to pay for photos: Hold a contest to get a bunch of free photos and use them for marketing and other for-profit uses. They depend on entrants who are typically too naive to know what they're giving up . . . NAUI ownership of every photo means not only that NAUI can use your photo for free to market themselves, but that you can't enter that photo in any other contest, whether you win or lose. Although NAUI makes it clear they get ownership of every entry, they don't make it clear what that means and don't intend to."

## Why NAUI Wants All Rights

Boom and a few other professional photographers pressed Jed Livingston, NAUI's marketing director, for details. Boom didn't get an answer directly but he did pass on to us Livingston's reply to a letter from Jason Heller, who runs DivePhotoGuide.com. Heller asked Livingston whether NAUI would be granting a license to use the photo. Livingston's reply: "No, we are seeking ownership rights. Submitting a photo to the contest for consideration transfers ownership, and the originator is not able to resell or provide the image to another entity without NAUI's written permission.

Heller considers these "abusive and overreaching usage rights." Livingston replied, "You are entitled to your opinion, however, we are collecting images to exclusively use in future NAUI products and promotions, and we make clear that by submitting a photo you relinquish ownership and any right to future compensation." Livingston wrote that the rules ensure that "any image we choose to associate with our brand, winner or not, will not circulate on the Internet, be used in a manner with which we might disagree, or be sold to the highest bidder once the exposure we provide adds value to the image."

*"Once we take an image, we don't want to see it used by another competitor or in a marketing campaign we disagree with."*

Heller told Livingston any worthy photographer will not enter if they read the rules, but Livingston replied: "There is no attempt to trick anyone into participating, and in the event all 'worthy photographers' choose to not participate, we will continue to operate our contest for those unworthy amateurs who want to try to win a prize or would like to see if their image is worthy enough to appear on a magazine cover or be included in the annual calendar."

Livingston called us to say professional photographers are mostly angry because the wave of cheap, easy-to-use technology is threatening the old way they do business. "It's one thing to offer an opinion, quite another to contact the contest sponsors we have relationships with, threaten them and bully them into withdrawing their support – that's tortious interference. We've run this contest for six years and now they complain? We've had thousands of entries from people who see the rules and agree to participate. And none of our sponsors have pulled out."

He says the reason NAUI uses the "all rights" clause is to make sure none of the photo entries are used in a way they don't like. "Once we take an image, we don't want to see it used by another competitor or see it in a marketing campaign we disagree with." But why all rights for photos that don't win? "It's just simpler. Everyone reads the same agreement, we don't have to reiterate anything, and we want to make sure everyone understands what they're entering." Livingston realizes professional photographers probably won't enter. "Some entrants say, 'I don't send my best images but I'll send my second, third or fourth best. I don't mind giving those away.' This is meant to spark an interest in photography, and if an amateur is sparked to become a professional photographer, then good for him."

## Amateurs versus Professionals

Clearly, divers who make money selling photos are perturbed, but at least 95 percent of the divers who take a camera underwater would never expect to sell a photo and would just be thrilled to see one published. After all, first place in this contest is a week's trip on a Blackbeard's cruise in the Bahamas, a party boat any serious photographer would never consider. So it looks to us like NAUI is targeting the amateur.

However, for professionals, the problem just isn't the photo contest but what the Internet has wrought by democratizing published writing and photography to the extent that people who have been making a living at it now compete with the world at large -- and it's tougher to make a living. Today, anyone can be a "published" writer or photographer on the Internet. Newspapers like *USA Today* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* publish articles by "content mills" like Demand Media and Associated Content, which provide content by paying rock bottom rates. They pay an average of \$15 for a 500-word article, so househusbands with a B.A. in English watching the baby as their full-time job crank out a piece a day for something to do. To the professional writer, this is not peanuts, not even

peanut shells, given the hours of researching that goes into an article. Some publications pay nothing - - ads on Craigslist.org offer writers a “chance to build up their writing portfolio” or “get the thrill of seeing their work published.” Photographers get the same offers.

Nonetheless, professionals are not happy with NAUI. “Totally unbelievable,” says Tony Bliss, who runs AquaQuest Publications. “One of the problems facing serious underwater photographers is that there are so many amateurs that would do anything to get their photos printed that they give them away. That, of course, reduces the ability of serious professionals to make a living.”

Photographer Davis Haas says it’s not just NAUI doing the all-rights lowballing. “I was a consultant at two PADI Total Submersion events and despite nice conversations with PADI employees about how I’d like to provide images, they want everything for a pittance. . . . Pay you a lowball amount for a one-time fee and buried [in the fine print] is you signing over practically all rights to your own photos.”

*“If the goal of the contest is strictly to obtain free images, that crosses moral and ethical boundaries in a substantial way.”*

Amos Nachoum says, “That is just unheard of . . . the good part is that NAUI made their rules public . . . [but] it is sad NAUI has to take such an extreme action to get images to promote the sport. . . . it is their decision and they will have to live with the feedback. . . . as well as with the quality of the images they may receive, which is likely to be

very low and amateurish. No semi-pro or professional photographer will touch it.”

Bonnie Pelnar, owner of the dive marketing firm Under Watercolours, told us, “ You don’t even have the right to put it on your website or Facebook page.” Pelnar contacted NAUI to find out the truth and was told, “We’ve been doing this for years and no one has complained before. Because we’re being very upfront about it, someone will come along and be okay with that in order to be featured in a calendar and a magazine.”

NAUI also asked Pelnar who it was that sent Livingston’s comments to Heller’s letter around the Web, because they want to send that person a letter from their attorney. “The guy told me, ‘We want to know who is spreading the rumors because we don’t want anyone to interfere with our business with our clients.’”

While this contest seems geared for amateur divers who may make their annual dive trip to the Caribbean and take a few underwater photos but never expect to sell them, Heller says it was amateur photographers who thought the guidelines too strict that alerted him to NAUI’s contest. “I’ve never once seen a contest that demanded ownership of all images. Sure, thousands of divers would love to see their photos used by a professional organization, but your ownership of them should not be handed over to a company for a free liveaboard trip that has a value much less than the value of the ownership of the photo. If the goal of NAUI’s contest is to engage the diving community, to take more photos, get in the water and enjoy this sport, that’s fine, but I think these are still really abusive guidelines. If the goal of the contest is strictly to obtain free images – which NAUI has confirmed – that’s a situation that crosses moral and ethical boundaries in a substantial way.”

“For the average photographer, the NAUI photo contest does sound like a good idea,” says Boom. “But even an average Joe photographer might get a big sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach if he sees his losing photo used over and over in NAUI promotional materials without a thing in return. It doesn’t take being a professional photographer to know when you’re being used.”

### **Better Contests to Try**

Check out underwater photo clubs and societies, which are typically nonprofit organizations and have more photographer-friendly rules. For instance, the Northern California Underwater Photographic Society states in the rules for its 2010 photo-video competition this month, “All persons selecting a prize agree that their image(s) or video may be used by NCUPS for promotion of the club and its competitions in future years.” That’s it. No all-rights grab for the end of time. Or consider the Cozumel Photo Shootout ([www.cozumelphotoshootout.com](http://www.cozumelphotoshootout.com)) on September 15-19 and sponsored by the Presidente InterContinental Cozumel & Resort and dive shop Scuba Du. They’re

offering \$11,000 in cash prizes, and, as per the website, “The rights of the images belong to the photographer, [who] will share the rights at no cost with Telefónica Movistar (main sponsor), the organizing committee and the Cozumel Promotion Board.”

Boom also recommends contests from the Los Angeles Underwater Photography Society, Beneath the Sea in New York and Our World Underwater in Chicago. “They’ve got prizes every bit as good as the big NAUI prize, and in some cases have more and better prizes and better odds. And if you enter and lose one of these contests and you think your photo’s deserving, you are free to enter it in all the other contests. NAUI’s self-serving competition robs competitors of that chance.”

“Hang onto your rights because they’re all you’ve got,” says Pelnar. “You may have put blood, sweat and tears into getting that photo. Is winning a dive trip or a piece of gear really worth giving all of your rights to that away?”

Apparently, to those who enter the NAUI photo contest, giving away their rights for a chance to spend a week on a Blackbeard’s Cruise, five nights in Kosrae, Micronesia, or get three two-tank dives from Stuart Cove in the Bahamas is no big deal, even if they have to pay their own airfare to get there.

-- Vanessa Richardson

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## Diving More Deadly Over Age 50?

### *media sensationalism obfuscates the truths*

Aviva Diodato came from Surprise, AZ to the Florida Keys for a dive trip with Islamorada’s Key Dives in April, but things did not go as planned. According to the Monroe County Sheriff’s Office, the group began its first dive of the day to the *Eagle* wreck when Diodato, 51, indicated she wanted to return to the surface. The instructor helped her to the surface, then returned to the group underwater. Diodato made it back to the stern of the *Giant Stride* and was removing her gear when she started to drift. When crew couldn’t reach her, they banged on the ladder to call divers to the surface. Once they were on board, the boat went after Diodato. They found her 20 minutes later, floating on the surface, not breathing. The crew pulled her onto the boat and started CPR but her heart had stopped.

At the time of her death, Diodato was the third diving fatality in the Florida Keys this year. And like her, the two other victims were in their 50s. Monroe County Medical Examiner’s records dating back to September 2008 show that 10 of the 16 divers who died during that time were at least 50 years old. So, when this information was reported in an April issue of the *Key West Citizen*, it was entitled: “50s More Deadly for Divers.” The same month, an article in the London newspaper *The Telegraph* was headlined: “Extreme Sports Killing the Elderly.” It reported that nearly 20 percent of all injury claims resulting from sports like diving and skiing, were made last year by Britons aged 70 or older, compared to just 5 percent in 2006. A third of the 212 people in British diving incidents requiring medical treatment last year were over 50, a significant increase compared to previous years.

#### **Putting Death Rates in Perspective**

Are the deaths among age 50-plus divers on the rise? Should senior divers stay out of the water? We know plenty well how editors write eye-catching headlines to hook readers, and figure multiple mentions of “deadly” and “dangerous” will keep eyeballs glued to the page. But we decided to ask researchers tracking dive deaths whether these articles are blowing things out of proportion.

Nicholas Bird, head of the medical department at Diver Alert Network (DAN), said, “as the general U.S. population ages and the number of people with disposable income also ages, the relative percentage of divers over age 50 is increasing. So it is safe to say that in the population over age 50, age- or cardiac-related deaths are increasing.”

Jim Watson, safety manager at the British Sub-Aqua Club (BSAC), told us that U.K. incident statistics show that “the number of ‘older’ divers who are dying when engaged in diving activities is disproportionate to their representation within the diving population, rather than more older divers dying.” He said the data reported in the *Telegraph* article are less comprehensive than those in the BSAC Incident Report ([www.bsac.com/incidents](http://www.bsac.com/incidents)) because they only include incidents where there was some Coastguard involvement. BSAC reports that around 16 percent of the U.K. diving population is aged over 50, but of fatalities in the last two years, 57 percent were those over 50. However, the 12-year average records 27 percent of fatalities were over 50.

***Some dive shop owners say the reason for dive deaths among older people is simply because they’re the majority diving these days.***

The 50-plus group also has more money to take high-risk dives. Some dive shop owners say the reason many dive fatalities occur among older people is simply that they are the majority of people putting on a tank these days. Who else can afford buying pricey dive gear, plus \$125 for a two-tank dive day?

“The recent changes may in part reflect an aging diving population, but they may equally reflect a temporary perturbation due to the very small sample size,” Watson said. “Given that the over-50 group is generally at an increased risk of death through medical related problems and that many, if not most, of the diving deaths seem to have a non-diving medical problem associated with them, then the 50+ mortality rate may not be significantly out of line with the overall population’s mortality rate. The numbers are relatively small to be statistically significant.”

Studying the ages of DAN members and all dive fatalities from 1992-2003, researchers found the annual fatality rates for divers up to age 25 were 10 per 100,000 divers, while for divers age 65 and over, the rate was 35 per 100,000 divers. The number of cardiac-related deaths in divers under age 35 was less than five percent, but for divers over age 50, it was 30 percent. They are 13 times more likely to have a disabling cardiac injury than younger divers.

### **Diving Itself Isn’t the Only Stressor**

DAN medical researcher Petar Denoble told the *Key West Citizen* earlier this year that chronic -- and frequently unknown -- cardiac problems are often at the root of diving fatalities. “They cause acute episodes that exacerbate underwater, and divers drown.” In looking at pre-diving health screening, DAN researchers note that a diver could follow all the available medical advice, get an annual physical checkup, and still have a health-related problem on a dive.

Diving is a big stressor but it doesn’t necessarily lead to a diver having major cardiac problems under the surface. Dive deaths for the over-50 set can also be precipitated by other factors. Lack of conditioning is a big one, and older divers lack it greatly, says Ern Campbell, M.D., a.k.a. the blogger ScubaDoc. “The majority of elderly divers do not exercise regularly or adequately,” he writes on his website. Therefore, while the fatality rate will be skewed because so many deaths are from heart attacks, one’s fitness level, agility, flexibility and strength -- or lack of these -- also play a role in what happens underwater.

DAN suggests that all divers 35 and older have an annual physical exam. But one doesn’t need a physical exam to be certified. Instead, trainees typically fill out a liability waiver, which includes multiple questions about their health and medical conditions. However, as we wrote earlier this year, it is easy for divers to lie and write “no” on the “do you have these conditions” checklist when they should be writing the opposite.

Some people in the industry say common sense is the best way for all divers, young and old, to stay safe. “They’re certified divers. They have a right to dive,” Brenda Mace, owner of Conch Republic Divers in Tavernier, told the *Key West Citizen*. “We cannot nor should the dive operator be responsible for the health of divers. It is an extreme sport.” She said that a few times through the years, she has refused a customer due to his physical condition, but such a move by a dive shop is extremely rare.

Bird says dive shops should not play medical gatekeeper and be in a decision-making place that is not appropriate for them. "It puts them in direct conflict with their customers. It falls on the shoulders of individual divers to make their medical decisions." He recommends divers with questions about health issues call DAN. "We can help you find referral doctors, explain how health issues can affect diving, and try to liaise with your dive store or resort. Our goal is to promote upfront communication instead of lying on the dive shop questionnaires."

Overall, however, age is just a number, and should not be the primary reason for not diving. "Really the issue is a diver's underlying health status," Bird says. "You can have a healthy 60-year-old diver and an unhealthy 40-year-old diver on the same boat, so if you're looking at an accident waiting to happen, age should not be the factor to rely upon."

Nonetheless, staying physically fit and being realistic about your health issues can keep you diving for a good long while. Doing the opposite, however, means you may not see the other end of age 65.

-- Vanessa Richardson

## Planning a Dive Trip during Hurricane Season?

In our June email to subscribers, we wrote that before you book a trip anywhere in the Caribbean from August to October, consider that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is predicting anywhere from 14 to 23 named storms, and three to seven hurricanes that hit Category 3 or higher. While most of the Caribbean is affected, favorite diving destinations such as the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, Cozumel, the Caymans and Belize are especially in harm's way.

As you can imagine, many people in the dive industry took us to task. For example, Gerlinde Seupel of Aquanauts Grenada wrote: "Hi Ben, not very helpful to join all the panicking forecasters who know nothing. The last 10 years, their predictions were always wrong! Instead, you should advise your readers of the approaching hurricane season and to consider precautions but still keep on traveling. After all, without traveling divers, your publication has no readers nor writers!" Seupel advised that travelers should get trip insurance.

Yes, a traveler in hurricane season should get travel insurance, but first we must note that NOAA forecasts for named tropical storms and hurricanes have been accurate in five out of the 10 years in this decade, according to a *USA Today* analysis. Its prediction was too low in four years, and too high in just one year, 2006. Eight of the 10 years saw above-average activity for tropical storms and hurricanes." Of course, NOAA can't predict where they will hit but a wise traveler should do his research, or head south of the hurricane belt to Bonaire or Grenada anyhow.

However, keep in mind that trip insurance is not a panacea. Most insurance policies will cover a trip disrupted because of a hurricane (when you are forced to arrive late or leave early for your trip), but you'll be reimbursed only for the affected days until the airport or resort reopens. You will usually be reimbursed for the days you are forced to stay at a resort during a hurricane, but read the fine print on your policy to make sure you are actually covered. And remember that you'll usually only be covered if you buy your insurance at the same time you book the trip or before any kind of hurricane watch or warning is issued. Otherwise, the hurricane might be deemed a pre-existing condition, meaning no compensation for you. If the airlines are operating and allowing passengers to fly to the destination, you'll usually be expected to leave for your vacation even if a hurricane threatens. Most insurers won't pay as long as the airline is flying, even if the resort you booked and paid for is totally destroyed by the storm. In a case like that, it's better to take advantage of the airline's more flexible change policy and rebook your trip for a different time and a different place. Of course, you can always buy the "cancel for any reason" policy, but those premiums can be twice -- or more -- the cost of a standard trip policy.

And if you don't have trip insurance? You're at the mercy of the hotel and dive operator for reimbursement. And for sure you won't be diving. You'll spend a lot of time worrying and wondering just what to do with your time. In 1989, I went to Grand Cayman for seven days. Dived two days, couldn't get a flight off the island, spent two nights on the floor in the East End Community Center and waited three more days for a flight. And no dive boats were going out. Wasn't how I expected to spend my holiday.

-- Ben Davison

# Flotsam & Jetsam

**Two Recalls.** SeaCure is having a sizing problem with some of its SeaCure Sport custom mouthpieces. It may stretch too much, causing the yellow insert to dislodge and enter the regulator, leading to breathing problems. If you have a SeaCure Sport mouthpiece on an Atomic regulator manufactured in 2005 and later, a Cressi Sub Ellipse regulator or a Zeagle regulator, call 800-428-9494 or e-mail recall@seacure1.com for a free replacement Hi-Flow custom mouthpiece. Aqualung is recalling nearly 2,000 Apeks WTX power inflators in the U.S. and Canada because the oral inflate button isn't properly bonded and that can cause leaking in the hose and mouthpiece. AquaLung received a report of a diver's oral inflate button falling off while he was diving but luckily he wasn't injured. The recall involves all models of the Apeks WTX power inflators sold between November 2006 and March 2010. Bring it to an Apeks dealer for a free fix, or call AquaLung at 877-253-3483.

**New Line of Work for Divers?** In a tough economy, divers can make a little extra money by finding valuable objects that accidentally went overboard. This apparently happens a lot with engagement rings. When Danny Geffre, a treasure-hunting diver from Long Lake, MN, heard about a woman who lost her \$7,000 Tiffany's engagement ring while boating on Lake Minnetonka, he donned his dive gear and spent three days searching the lake with a metal detector. Geffre found the ring buried in three inches of sand and was given a \$750 reward for his efforts.

**BelizeTour Proposal Irks Locals.** Mexico Rocks, a dive site six miles north of San Pedro Town on Belize's Ambergris Caye, is the site of a tourism project that has residents and environmentalists up in arms. Developer David Gegg wants to create the Sea Trek underwater

tour, which would allow anyone to walk on a rope-railed sea-floor path near the barrier reef while wearing an underwater helmet and attached by a rope to a barge above. Marine biologist Ken Mattes told a Belize TV station that people constantly walking on the bottom will stir up sediment, causing it to rise up into the water column and drop back down on the coral. The Department of the Environment has already given Sea Trek the go-ahead, but it still needs approval from other government agencies.

**Get a Better View Underwater.** Subscriber Mel McCombie (New Haven, CT) has this tip for mature divers with eyesight issues: "Take one SeaVision Gauge Reader mask and swap out one lens with either a SeaVision flat glass mask or one of the many brands of the same size (TUSA Liberator, Blue Reef, etc.) The result is one eye is able to see close up but with a much wider overall view because both lenses are not taken up by the reading lens in each corner. It's especially good for those with small faces since the Gauge Readers take up a lot of the field of view. There are other companies making masks with magnifier lenses, but I have compared and found the SeaVision optics to be the smoothest, with no horizontal line."

**Photographer Dies During Florida Dive.** Wes Skiles, a renowned freelance photographer for *National Geographic*, died July 21 while filming underwater off of Boynton Beach. Skiles, known for his photos and videos of underwater caves and the deep ocean, was filming researchers working on a reef near Boynton Beach Inlet when he signaled to colleagues that he was going to the surface. A few minutes later, they also headed to the surface but found Skiles, 53, unconscious on the ocean floor. They tried to revive him on the boat but he was pronounced dead at a West Palm Beach hospital; cause of death is unknown. Skiles was on a *National Geographic* assignment about the behavior of high-speed fish off the Florida coast. His work, including a cover shot of Bahamas caves, appears in the August issue of the magazine.

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