

# undercurrent

*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

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## *Arenui, Komodo Island, Indonesia*

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### *here there be dragons -- and fish big and tiny*

Dear Fellow Diver,

Discovering new dive destinations has redefined my scuba diving. Traveling aboard the boutique vessel Arenui, a typical wooden phinisi, my September trip to Indonesia provided muck diving, strong currents that required reef hooks, bottomless reef walls and best of all, amazing new sightings daily. Like the aptly named Bobbitt worm, which looks like the infamous member hacked off by the equally infamous Lorene Bobbitt. You remember that, right?

Departing Benoa Harbor in Denpasar, Bali, we rocked and rolled overnight in moderately rough seas and windy conditions as we headed for Lombok Island. I think all of the 12 divers aboard heeded the predeparture warning: if you are weak of stomach, pop a pill. The next morning, we dived on the east side of Lombok near the island of Gili Lawang. Disappointed in seeing blasted reefs, we moved nearby to make an exploratory muck dive. Usually observed with his head protruding out of the sand, a snake eel slithered along. I spotted a school of striped catfish, crinoid shrimp, a spiny devilfish, a cockatoo waspfish, a hairy angler (i.e., a frogfish), and ghost and Halameda pipefish. A carrier crab toted a piece of wood on its shell. Even so, a mediocre dive, given what was to come.

Our next stop was near the city of Bima on the northern coast of Sumbawa. The site of Tanyung Sai had great visibility, however, despite being told not to stir up the fine black sand, too many sand kickers -- experienced divers, mind you -- ruined photos by unleashing floating silt. Still, the critters were interesting. A coconut octopus held a crab in its beak, an



The *Arenui*



orange frogfish was blind in one eye, a pinkie-size cuttlefish squirted away in a flash. A rare *Melibe nudi*, appearing thin and limp, looked like floating tissue paper. Gerry, the divemaster, pointed out unhatched cuttlefish eggs, and a pipefish carrying her own eggs. On a clownfish, he noted two speck-like microscopic-size isopods that suck the clown's blood.

The upscale 142-foot *Arenui* (Indonesian for "small wave"), was built from mostly indigenous recycled wood and began operating in 2009. With space for 16 divers, she carried a crew of 22, including two cruise directors, Debbie Benton from the U.K. and Geraldo (Gerry) Arriaga from Mexico City, an engaged and engag-

ing couple. Their management is all about comfort and service. (At \$5,000 plus for 12 days, not to mention airfare, it darn well better be.) Below decks are six cabins; four master suites are on the main deck. The beautiful cabins have batiks, Oceanic and Balinese artwork, copper light fixtures and brass hanging hooks. Carved wooden vanities had round counter tops and marble sinks with brass faucets. While there were no closets, drawer and cabinet space was ample. In mosaic-tiled bathrooms, waterfall showers drain on the wood-slatted floors before reaching the toilet. (Toilet paper goes in a garbage can alongside.)

The unconventional dive deck on the pitched bow, where wetsuits were hung to dry, would be cramped with a full load of divers. After disembarking from tenders at the stern (there was a hot water shower there), one had to stroll through the salon. It worked, because the staff mopped constantly (which is one reason why they need 22 staffers). The cheerful crew always ensured gear was clean, dry, and ready to go. They transported it to and from the tenders and provided a clean towel after each dive.

Their two basic tenders have wooden seats with spaces for tanks. Rides were 10 minutes or less. (During one ride, Gerry cannibalized another regulator to repair my leaking ancient Mark V before we reached the dive site.) If the current was strong, we made a direct descent; if too strong, we went to another site. Like a drill sergeant, divemaster Tobi would command: "Mask on, air in, 1, 2, 3, go!" and we backrolled. After the drift, the tenders picked us up quickly and we climbed back in via a metal ladder with thin and uneven rungs -- it took a hefty leg swing to complete maneuver. The water ranged between 71 and 82 degrees (air temperatures were in the high 70s). I always wore a 5-mm suit and added a skin or two, plus a hooded lined vest. Maximum dive time was 70

## The Komodo Dragons

Four days into our journey, we arrived at Komodo National Park, home of the world's largest monitor lizard. The Komodo dragon bites to kill. Once it gets a taste of blood, it is impossible to separate it from its prey. The toxic bacteria in its saliva creates an infection that slowly kills the animal. Komodos will devour everything, including the hide.

Close to 10 feet in length, they weigh as much as 150 pounds. They have no predators. Komodos fight with one another and cannibalize their young, weak and old. Hatchlings, to avoid being eaten, live in trees for two years. In Komodo National Park, an estimated 2,500 dragons live on five of the islands. They swim, pro-

pelled by their long tail. After being warmed by the sun to their optimal temperature, they develop the energy to hunt. They can smell prey as far as seven miles away.

Two rangers took my dive group for a 90-minute hike on the arid and hilly island. I saw at least a dozen dragons and wondered if the rangers had overfed these motionless giants (they once fed them goats to entertain tourists). As we climbed the hill overlooking the bay and the *Arenui*, we saw their prey: water buffalo and Timor deer. Several Komodos were near the trail, one drinking from a stream. Since the guides needed only to carry long forked sticks to keep them at bay, I figured there wasn't much to fear, though a Komodo killed a local eight-year-old boy in 2008.

-- N.M.

minutes. While there was a flexible buddy system, I stuck with Gerry like a leech, as he had an eye for everything.

At Hot Rocks, a site at Sangeang Volcano, warm sulfuric bubbles trickled up from the sand. I admired a pair of cowries, covered with their black mantles, resting in a sponge. A large black lionfish carried eggs on her spine, and a green turtle gnawed on a sponge. (Gerry had heard it gives them a "buzz." How would anyone know?) Glassy eyes rose in columns. Thousands of crinoids and orange anthias formed rainbows. A yellow and black ribbon eel burrowed in the sand under table coral. When I hit a raging current that created a black sand storm, I kicked hard to rest behind a beautiful reef covered with every imaginable soft and hard coral. In the shallows, I spied a spiny devilfish, a variety of nudibranchs, and several blue painted lobsters.

After a direct descent in a two-plus knot current at Crystal Rock, I made good use of my reef hook to admire a three-foot-long Napoleon wrasse, big-eye trevally, surgeonfish, schools of fusiliers and several white-tips, one of which was pregnant. At Castle Rock, I watched surgeons chased by trevally with sharks following. The fish were so thick I thought the sun had been eclipsed.

Our next stop was Rinca Island's Cannibal Rock. Considered one of the world's top 10 dive sites, it was discovered by the late Larry Smith, an Indonesia dive icon. In chilly 72-degree water, I found a giant pink frogfish and some red sea apples, a species of sea cucumber which were closed while others were open and feeding. A yellow pygmy seahorse clung to a sea fan. Afterwards, while some divers kayaked, I indulged myself in a so-so massage on the top deck.

We ate when we weren't diving or sleeping. A "small" breakfast included fruit, yogurt and cereal, followed by a "big" breakfast (including perfectly poached eggs and crisp bacon) after the first 8 a.m. dive. Lunch buffets included homemade soup, entrees of fish, chicken, pork, and pasta, plus fresh vegetables and fruit, noodles and rice. The third dive, around 3 p.m., was followed by a snack of either pizza, fish sticks, tropical fruit, cookies, even a fresh cake. Dinner was a four-course, sit-down meal that included a salad, homemade soup, a choice of two entrees, and a homemade dessert served with ice cream. To accommodate night divers, two dinner times were offered. There was a full honor bar, and a fine but pricey wine (\$30 to more than \$100). Strong Balinese, finely ground coffee was always available; espresso was an additional \$2.50 (seems chintzy given the Sultan's fortune for this voyage). While food was generally excellent, the Mexican fare flopped. The only fresh fish served was the first night's tuna sashimi. (The explanation was that we were diving in a national park where fishing is restricted, and I'm all for leaving fish on the reefs we visited. But they did offer frozen tuna, red snapper, or butterflyfish and honored dietary requests.)

Dinner was served either on the top deck or in the salon, where there were two tables for eight and a couple of cozy booths. The salon has several lounge areas, a camera charging station, two Mac computers loaded with Adobe Photoshop CS5, and two flat screen TVs, used for PowerPoint briefings for each dive. One screen displayed a virtual GPS of our route. I often kicked back on the top deck in a comfortable canvas deck lounge.

Before I departed, Ben Davison forwarded me comments from an Undercurrent subscriber who had been on the boat a few weeks before. She had a few complaints and he asked me to verify them. Yes, as it turned out, several cabins had occasional roach sightings. However, I'm little bothered because I expect a few in the tropics (so I

## Arenui, Indonesia

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

★ = poor      ★★★★★ = excellent

*World Scale*

didn't keep food in my cabin, as Debbie cautioned). Yes, the boat creaked and doors rattled. I braced my main deck cabin's creaking door with a towel, and locked the louvered folding bathroom door to prevent it from banging. The Garuda cabin had exhaust fumes, but they subsided after a couple days. At the introductory briefing, Debbie cautioned, "Our wooden decks are like banana peels. Take the gray rubber-mat road. We don't want you to slip." Yes, the decks were particularly slick when wet, so I always wore my Texas. (I'm too old to fall down. Aren't we all?) Steps throughout the boat are high and uneven. Handholds seem randomly placed. Debbie didn't ignore problems, and in fact encouraged us to speak up. "It is a phinisi. We have three engineers on board. We don't want you to complain about something that we will fix for the next group." When we moved at night, the creaking in his lower deck cabin bothered one diver, so Debbie had him sleep in an upper deck cabin.

South Africans Leon and Claudia Pellarini-Joubert, professional underwater photographers who live in Papua New Guinea, coached us gratis in Photoshop CS5 (see their work at [www.bittenbysharks.com](http://www.bittenbysharks.com)). While we all had cameras, only one American had an SLR. Our congenial group -- including two French Canadians, three South Africans, and three Americans -- ranged in age from the 30s to nearly 70. And none was cranky or a complainer. One American had biceps that would rival anyone's. To help me get my wet-suit over my widest part, he gently picked me up off the deck.

Our fourth daily dive was after sundown. While we all participated in one or more night dives, there were only two regulars. At Torpedo, off Rinca Island, a hairy frogfish lay camouflaged in soft coral. There were skeleton shrimp, a coconut octopus, even the Bobbitt worm. The bone-chilling 71-degree water limited my dive to 40 minutes.

With so many liveboards plying these waters, there is an unwritten rule that the first boat at a site has priority and others do not put their divers in the water. But when one boat ignored our presence at Cannibal Rock, we made an exploratory dive in Crinoid Canyon, returning when the other divers left. Here, I saw two mimic octopuses that scurried along the sand, not stopping to contort themselves into the shapes of one of the many critters they could amazingly mimic. In Manta Alley, on the south side of Komodo Island, 10 large mantas appeared on each of two dives but quickly zipped away. At Pink Beach, colorful mandarin fish engaged in their mating ritual, swirled in thick fields of staghorn coral.

Leaving the marine park, we motored to Takat Makassar Channel between Flores and Komodo. Flying in the current, I buzzed up and past a dozen mantas, hoping they would dodge me. I was out of steerage control and I'm sure they knew. What a thrill! Discovery Bay, along Flores Island, is a 19-hour steam from the island of Sabalon.

## A Mouthpiece to Prevent Diver's Mouth

Dear Ben,

I am a practicing dentist for 32 years, and have had some training in diagnosing and treating patients with jaw pain. Your article in the September issue about the diver's mouth syndrome was interesting. Some of the information stated by Dr. Katz is correct. The reason why divers get pain in their jaws after diving repeatedly is due to clenching their teeth. They may clench due to stress, excitement or trying to hold onto the second stage, especially if it is heavy. If the mouthpiece just provides a section for the front teeth only to bite on, the jaw joints can get sore if the diver is clenching.

This can occur less if the mouthpiece extends to where the front and back teeth all bite at the same time with

equal pressure. A moldable mouthpiece that you warm up and bite into can provide a more stable biting surface, and equalize the biting pressure among all the teeth evenly, theoretically. But if the mouthpiece also has a large area behind the lips (where the lips and cheeks help to hold it in the mouth), it can help to decrease the amount of clenching a diver might do.

My wife and I have used a Seacure mouthpiece for years with no problems. I went online and found a "Manta Bite" mouthpiece. This one has the large area where the lips and cheeks can hold it in, but nothing really to bite on. I have never tried it, but it may work great. But I am curious to know how much cheek and lip muscle is needed to hold it in. It's possible these muscles could get tired if they have to work too much.

-- Wayne Joseph, South San Francisco, CA

Indonesian fishermen continue to blast fish and destroy reefs. Nevertheless, it's a muck divers' paradise, though one touch from a fin created a black sandstorm cloud mixed with dead leaves and twigs. Here, I saw many new critters: still unplaced in the genus octopus, the mosaic is cream colored with spotted arms. It has a unique darkish mosaic pattern and an extended mantle.

My trip ended at the port of Maumere on Flores Island, with not the best of conclusive dives, but I had so many great ones, why quibble? After our final dinner on the top deck at the "Sky" restaurant, our crew performed a "sing-sing." Dancing and singing, some in Papua headdress, they embraced us goodbye. New friends, great diving, beautiful weather, lots of new sightings, Komodo dragons, excellent food, great service and luxury. The boat amenities, despite some issues, were great. Though it was a pricey 12 days, I left satisfied, knowing that even at the price, I surely didn't get my pocket picked.

-- D.L.



**Divers Compass:** Depending on the season, the Arenui travels throughout Indonesia for varied periods; My 12-day Komodo voyage cost \$5,200, not including alcohol or espresso, plus Nitrox for \$180, and one complimentary 30-minute massage . . . My trip required a night in Bali on both ends . . . There is no internet access, and the satellite phone costs \$5 per minute . . . Batavia Air charges for excess baggage . . . To get around, you need Indonesian rupiah, not American dollars . . . Maumere is predominantly Catholic, but we could hear the Call to Prayer. . . Having an afternoon departure from Maumere, Arenui arranged

a complimentary tour to see a small museum and a village, which is better than sitting at the airport . . . Website: [www.thearenui.com](http://www.thearenui.com)

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## Lion's Dive & Beach Resort, Curacao

*for families, suntanners and easy divers*

Dear Fellow Diver,

Watching coral not spawning is hard work! I traveled to Curacao during one of the mid-September weeks coral is supposed to spawn. The special evening dive, at a price of \$85, began with a coral spawning presentation and a picnic supper, then onto the boats for a short ride to the dive site. I entered the water along with 40 other divers, picked a coral head that looked like it might decide to spawn -- who am I to know? -- and spent one hour and 15 minutes trying to watch the coral head while practicing perfectly neutral buoyancy so it wouldn't spawn on the sly when I wasn't looking. I was reminded of my trip to see the swirling manta rays feeding at night in Hawaii. They didn't show up, either. The next night, three of us went out from shore to the exact same coral heads--still not spawning, but a feeding octopus made the dive worthwhile.

I was with a group of divers staying at Lion's Dive and Beach Resort. Tabor Tours had met our group and transported us the 20 minutes to the resort. Check-in was quick, although the staff forgot to give some of the people their towel cards, and some divers had to wait for rooms. They urged us to meet quickly at the dive shop for our briefing before the staff went home at 5 p.m. so we would have our locker assignments and wouldn't have to waste time in the morning. Very efficient.

Ocean Encounters' three boats that were being used all held at least 20 divers comfortably. They had sufficient cover from the sun, heads, and emergency equipment; the Phoenix was the fastest and most comfortable. Between dives, crew provided oranges, water and Tang. I set up my tank each morning; the staff changed tanks between dives if I wanted. I dunked my camera in the large plastic rinse can, then put it somewhere safe



because it filled up fast. They did not wash any gear or transport it on or off the boat, but I preferred taking care of my own gear anyway. On the dock were two large rinse tanks and two freshwater showers.

The large resort was near capacity, mostly with non-diving Americans. There's a fine beach, two small pools and a 50-meter pool, great for swimming laps. Good snorkeling out front is easy, with coral heads and the usual tropicals. A long lagoon between the beach and a breakwater is also suitable for protected, easy swimming or snorkeling. As one expects with these family resorts, there are a vari-

ety of restaurant choices. Hemingway's offers a breakfast buffet, lunch and dinner. A small pizzeria next to the large pool serves pizzas and sandwiches for the beach crowd. Nemo's, near the lobby, is a more romantic and upscale restaurant, meaning, I was just paying more for less food. I ventured off the resort grounds a couple of times for good meals at the restaurant next to the aquarium, or the other direction to Cabana's. And there are plenty of other choices -- for smaller eating spots along the beach, take the complimentary bus to town, or grab a taxi (two Italian restaurants were within 10 minutes of the resort if the taxi driver didn't go the long way). My most memorable meal was at Hemingway's on Cuban night -- the food was exceptional and the live Cuban band very entertaining. For \$30, it was money well spent. I don't know what's with divers, but most never seem to do much exploring of their destination. Willemstad has quaint, colorful buildings, a working pontoon bridge and lots of shopping. But every time I thought I would go, shore diving won out.

Each morning, two boats left the dock between 8 and 8:30 a.m., depending on how far we were going. Captains and divemasters differed almost daily. Jeremiah, the only one with us for all six days of diving, is a gem -- very personable and outgoing, and he went the extra mile to make his divers happy. He's been working there for eight years, long past the burnout stage for many guides. Although some hard corals are algae-covered, there are plenty of healthy corals and sponges, and soft corals, such as gorgonians, are large, healthy and numerous. Generally, the sloping wall begins in about 20 feet of water, so it was easy to do a 100-foot dive, work my way up the wall, and finish my 50-minute dive on top of the wall before a safety stop. Jeremiah often let us stay down longer on the second dive. Water temperatures of 84 degrees made it comfortable, and for these profiles, there was no need to use nitrox except on the Superior Producer, a small freighter, roughly 200 feet long and sitting at 104 feet. The visibility was good, allowing me to see at least half of the boat. The holds are empty. The passage heading to the engine room was tempting, but we were advised to stay out.

Another special dive that costs extra is Mushroom Forest, taking more than an hour to get to. The healthy coral is shaped like mushrooms, caused by bacteria that ate away the coral from the bottom up. Fish hide in the innards of the coral. Between dives, I did a short snorkel to the Blue Room, a cutout cave with glassy sweepers in the back.

I didn't have any bad or boring dives. All were typically Caribbean -- pleasant and relaxing, with plenty of small, colorful fish, including cowfish, spotted drums, filefish and even flying gurnards. Christmas tree worms numbered in the thousands. Moray eels are fairly common, and I

## Lion's Dive Resort, Curacao

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

★ = poor      ★★★★★ = excellent

Caribbean Scale

## Which Dive Computers for High Altitude Diving?

Most diving is obviously done at sea level but there are some freshwater divers who go to lakes in the Sierra Nevadas, the Rocky Mountains and other places 2,500 feet and higher. If they're relying on the dive computers they use while diving at sea level, they may not be getting the correct readings for decompression levels.

"Depth estimation will be affected, and at high altitude, a diver will need to dive deeper in the water column to achieve the same depth reading as at sea level," says Martin Sayer, editor of the journal *Underwater Technology*. "This effect will be amplified in freshwater if the dive computer pressure sensor is calibrated to brackish or full seawater. Altitude has an obvious effect when the diver surfaces and continues to off-gas at much different pressure gradients to those expected at sea level."

Which dive computers perform best at different levels? Peter Buzzacott of the University of Western Australia and Alex Ruehle of the University of Denver took 11 top-selling dive computers on eight freshwater dives, six at low altitude (130 feet above sea level) and two at 10,000 feet above sea level. At high altitude, time was allowed for each dive computer to clear out residual nitrogen before the first dive. Four of the dive computers failed at the onset, leaving two Uwaterc

Aladin Sport models, two Dive Rite NiTek models, two Suunto Vypers, and a Delta P Technology VR3.

Agreement between each brand model was good when it came to depth, but the range of no-decompression limits at high altitude was pretty wide. The Suunto Vypers were the least conservative at low altitude, but they were consistently the most conservative at high altitude.

The opposite can be said for the VR3. The other models fell in between. But overall, the computers' no-deco limits were less conservative than those in published dive tables - they ranged from 31 to 42 minutes at a depth of 60 feet, but published tables for 10,000-foot altitude dives recommend no-deco levels of just five minutes at 60 feet.

Buzzacott and Ruehle suggest that manufacturers publish anticipated no-deco levels for dives at a standard altitude, say 5,000 feet, in instruction manuals for more valid comparison between dive computers intended for use at altitude. Until then, they recommend that high-altitude divers using computers also check the appropriate decompression tables. Despite modern dive computers providing decompression information up to 20,000 feet in altitude, the higher the altitude you're doing dives at, the more you should consider your dive computer's no-deco levels to be "experimental."

*"The effects of high altitude on relative performance of dive decompression computers," Underwater Technology, vol. 28, no. 2, pgs. 51-55.*

also spotted a small snake eel. I saw one turtle, a couple of small rays, and a very large black grouper swimming below me, but no sharks. I found a few lionfish for the guides to deal with. On one dive, Jeremiah found a very cooperative, pure white mantis shrimp almost out of its hole. Usually, we returned to the boat at the end of the dive, but a couple of dives were one-way drift/kick dives. We were a loose-knit group, following the guides but not plastered to them.

One can rent any sort of room at Lion's Dive, from basic digs overlooking the parking lot to a penthouse. The oceanfront suite may have a king or two double beds, but they all have an ocean view, a couch, mini refrigerator, and a balcony or patio. My suite had two double beds, a large bathroom, full kitchen, pull-down bed, sleeper couch, a chair, two televisions, a large deck and access to a private beach. One caution: On weekends, a loud band plays at a nearby resort. Earplugs saved my night.

The unlimited shore diving was easy and decent. Each group was required to tow a dive flag and stay on the surface while in the boat channel. Then it was to the left or right, staying shallow or kicking the two minutes to the sloping wall. During the shore dives, I found the den of a large octopus, several two-foot-long pufferfish, lobsters and yellow-headed jawfish. At night, there were thousands of shrimp-eyes shining like Christmas tree lights. The divemasters diligently look for and spear lionfish, and they appear to be under control at the most-visited dive sites. At the sites we went to that are not frequently dived, a dozen might be killed.

Lion's Dive is perfect for a big family, people who love beaches and pools, and groups that want to keep it simple. Painless travel, good food, nice rooms, pleasant staff and no surprises make Lion's Dive a no-brainer for Caribbean diving, especially in hurricane season, because the storms don't make it this far south. And I had a

romantic bonus: My room key got me in to the aquarium next door, where the dolphin show is entertaining and I received a kiss from a sea lion (they have very soft lips).

-- D.J.



**Divers Compass:** My DEMA special group package for an oceanfront from was \$1,260 per person and included lodging, two dives a day, breakfast buffet, airport transfers and the Mushroom Forest dive trip . . . The in-room safe was \$1.50 per day; Internet was available, but evidently slow and expensive so nobody used it. . . Beers averaged \$4, but there were several "happy hours" with half-price drinks; pizzas ran about \$15 (enough for two people), Hemingway's averaged \$20 a meal, and Nemo's ran me \$30 . . . Taxi rides into town averaged \$15 per cab, but the complimentary hotel shuttle ran three or four times a day, so it was

easy to take the shuttle into town and grab a taxi or a local bus back to the hotel; taxis picked up at the major hotels after 6 p.m. . . I didn't have a problem with bugs, but some did; bring DEET just in case . . . Websites: Lion's Dive & Beach Resort - [www.lionsdive.com](http://www.lionsdive.com); Ocean Encounters - [www.oceanencounters.com](http://www.oceanencounters.com)

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## Australia, Grand Cayman, Philippines . . .

### *and when it's really the best time to dive in Raja Ampat*

**Great Barrier Reef, Australia.** Last month, we gave good marks to the *Spoilsport* and its trip to the Great Barrier Reef and beyond. A number of boats leave Cairns for the GBR and many are less expensive, but Michael Judd (Oregon City, OR) says: "The *Kangaroo Explorer* demonstrates the adage that you get what you pay for. Our three-day, two-night trip starts with a ride on another company's boat out to their 'day on the reef' barge, moored about 20 miles offshore. We transfer to the *Kangaroo Explorer* and head a couple of miles out to the first dive site. The operator supplies the equipment as part of the price. Many BCs were on their last legs. They also provided a 3mm shortie wetsuit with long sleeves -- medium and large ended up being hard to find -- and there was no way to keep the same suit, as there were different divers every day (think about that one). The consoles had computers but no instruction was provided and some of the multiple newbies had never used a computer before. No compass in the console, which was missed as most of the dives were unguided. Tanks were small. Briefings were brief, and on some dives, not given at all. There was usually, although not always, one guide in the water. On one dive, my buddy and I were caught in a current and ended up surfacing about 500 yards from the boat. Our waves for a pickup were ignored, although we did get a wave back and were signaled to swim to the boat. Why? Because the little outboard was being used by the captain to attempt to push on the *Explorer* to relieve tension on the mooring line that had wrapped around one of the propellers. After a long hard swim back to the ship, the only comment from the crew was to give me a bad time about using up the last of the air in my tank on the swim back! As a final gesture, the crew asked the departing guests to clean 'their' equipment after the last dive. At least one guest did not do so. The boat's schedule, returning to the barge to pick up or drop off divers twice a day, limits the *Explorer's* range, which means many of the same sites are used three or four times over the course of three days."

**Grand Cayman.** Serious divers give good marks to the Cobalt Coast Resort, its dive operator, Divetech, and the Sea Camp it offers in the summer, where kids can be attended to while parents dive. Scott George (Long Beach, CA) was there in July and said, "Cobalt Coast is a wonderful, small resort on Grand Cayman's northwest coast. The rooms were nice and spacious, and the food was excellent. The Divetech staff was very organized, had excellent facilities, was personable and knowledgeable, and promoted a strong sense of safety while allowing every diver to dive his own profile. I was surprised at how outstanding the condition of the reef was -- very large coral formations were everywhere, and fish life was abundant. Turtles were always around, and we did see a number of rays and several types of eel. Kids Sea Camp was well run. The activities were well organized and the supervision was excellent. The staff knows children well, and I was especially impressed at how well they were able to teach

the young ones to be comfortable with a mask and snorkel while also being able to handle young teenagers.”  
**(www.cobaltcoast.com)**

As for Cayman diving, however, the West End has generally become a waste of time for serious divers. Says Patrick Flynn (Washington, D.C.), who stayed at the once venerable Sunset House in September, “The reefs are in decline, and everybody knows it, thanks to the multiple compounded threats of pollution, diver damage, warming, acidification and overfishing. One reef we dove, Eagle Ray Rock, showed it is holding on, even recovering, but it is like a ghost town in terms of mature fishes. No breeders, no brood, and it is only a matter of time. Of ‘keystone species,’ algae eaters are needed most. There are hardly any schools anywhere along the west coast. On a dive at Eden Rock, I asked our captain where the protected areas of Grand Cayman are, and he told me we were in one. The reef is virtually dead. I also went for a night dive off Sunset’s house reef and saw one flamingo tongue and a barracuda. What was once a reef now looks like poured concrete. This is characteristic of much of the house reef above the wall. The rest of the 10 or so sites up and down the West End were not as well off as the two at the extreme north and south. All sites show chronic stress, more than 50 percent are dead coral covered with algae.” On Cayman, go north and east, my friends.

**The Philippines.** There are scores of good diving resorts here at decent prices, so don’t end up in an overpriced hole, says Carl Scott (Spring, TX), who went to the Crystal Blue Resort in September. “Overpriced everything. Not for the diver who just loves to cruise and enjoy the scenery, but truly great for macro. Staff was great, guides very capable but at an average of USD\$53 per dive (with a nitrox premium of \$10), it is anything but a bargain in this part of the world. Accommodations were Spartan; at USD \$86 per night, it’s truly a ripoff. Better accommodations with at least equivalent diving can be found in other areas and nearly half that price. Rooms are small, with a simple bed and small ‘armoire,’ what they might think is a small desk, and a small table with two chairs on the veranda. Bathrooms worked okay but have what must be years of soap scum accumulated on shower walls and plumbing fixtures. My guess is that the staff simply was never shown by its Californian owner how to clean a bathroom.”

Not many Philippine diving resorts are built with American tastes in mind, but now there is Liquid Dumaguete. Greg Liebman (Round Lake Park, IL) visited in September. “Liquid is a brand-new dive operation built from scratch by owners Tim and Zoe Latimer, who managed dive operations at Exotic Resort on Malapascua, Philippines, and Dive Little Corn on Little Corn Island, Nicaragua. The resort consists of eight ensuite cabanas, all with a sea view, clustered near the beach and the pool. Each cabana has a geothermal heated shower, a nice deck, excellent ceiling fan and very comfortable platform bed. There is a main lodge, set above the dive shop and classrooms, with beautiful views of the sea and mountains, a nice little bar, abundant electrical outlets, DVD and TV, a lending library and a comfy, lay-about lounge. WiFi is pretty fast and free, and prices for the cabanas and meals are very reasonable. I’m becoming a reluctant convert to muck diving, and Dumaguete is definitely a place to indulge. Whether shore diving or making a short trip by boat, the macro is exceptionally good. Ornate and robust ghost pipefish abound. Frogfish on nearly every dive, sea snakes, nudis of every imaginable description, and the highlight -- flamboyant cuttlefish! When you’re ready for some color and fish, Apo Island and Siquijor are day trips run regularly from Liquid. Experienced divers are given more latitude to dive their own profile within limits, once they’ve demonstrated their abilities. Tim and Zoe are instructors committed to the dive experience.” **(www.liquiddumaguete.com)**

**Mexican Yucatan.** If you want to dive Mexico’s Mayan Coast, Dressel Divers continues with its good reviews. Frank Nelson (North Huntingdon, PA), there in September, reports, “Very environmentally conscientious, good dive briefings, professional and watchful for newbies. There was no anchoring so everything was done as drift dives. They went out of their way to find and point out critters. The boat carried eight divers max, plus divemasters, who even

## We Need Your Reader Reports

We need your travel reviews for the *2012 Travelin’ Divers’ Chapbook*, which will be available to subscribers in December. To send them in (deadline is November 20), complete the online form at **www.undercurrent.org/members/UCnow/SubRRTopMA.php**, or you can follow the link “File a Report” on the left side of our homepage; or after logging in, follow the “Reader Report” link in the top navigation bar.

carried some divers' gear onto and off the boat due to age and back issues. There was no dock, so you had to carry all your gear through the surf to the boat. Tanks were already on board. At times, I thought I had a valet because they wanted to rinse and store my gear. Cenote dives were very good. The only problem was the time it took. We had to leave Iberostar then go into Playa to pick up other divers, then go to Barcelo to get tanks and gear, then finally to the cenote. Cave instructors Julian and Matt gave a history lesson of the cenote system and really stressed neutral buoyancy. They checked everything on everyone before entering. What a sight! No matter how many times I do the cenotes and even repeat some, I never tire of them. Simply breathtaking." ([www.dresseldivers.com](http://www.dresseldivers.com))

**Raja Ampat Seasons.** We reviewed Raja Ampat in March and got an email from Larry McKenna (Kingwood, TX), who said, "There are better and more land-based dive resorts there now. The newest is Raja Ampat Dive Lodge, just a few hundred meters from Max Ammer's, on a long white beach. Twenty cabins to hold 50 guests in class. Rates are well below the Euro charged by Max. And the dive season from November to May? Nope! This is a misconception pushed by travel agents. Except for access to Misool, all the Ampats and lots more can be better dove in our summer months, July and August being the preferred. I just returned from two months of doing just that. Seas were 'normal' for this season, with infrequent showers. John Bantin, the writer of our travel article, replies "I've checked my original copy. I'm afraid that a mistake has occurred. When to go: anytime. But liveaboards tend to operate in the area between November and May." ([www.komodoalordive.com/RajaAmpatDiveLodge.htm](http://www.komodoalordive.com/RajaAmpatDiveLodge.htm))

-- Ben Davison

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## The Nautilus Lifeline Finally Ships

### *and how a little openness can prevent PR headaches*

The Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) is holding its annual convention November 2-5. If it's like previous shows, there will be a product or two that never make it to market, and several that clearly aren't ready for market.

That was exactly what happened last year, when the Nautilus Lifeline was touted as the next wave of diver safety. It's a pocket-sized, 10 oz., GPS VHF radio depth-rated to 120 meters that allows you to broadcast an alarm and your GPS location to every vessel within an eight-mile radius. Lights will flash, horns will go off and everyone's radio will autoswitch to channel 16, showing your GPS coordinates as you float away from your dive boat. The Nautilus Lifeline will put an end to "Open Water" stories.

It was to be available in late March. Magazines jumped on that bandwagon, promoting the Lifeline, resulting in more than 6,000 pre-orders. Then the ship date changed to May, then June, then the end of July. In fact, July was still listed as the ship date on the website ([www.nautiluslifeline.com](http://www.nautiluslifeline.com)) until September 27, when we interviewed Nautilus Lifeline CEO Mike Lever and made him aware of the expired sell-by date. Now, a year after the PR blast at DEMA, it's finally being shipped.

Lever says its production woes and broken promises from his overseas suppliers. "We've been at the mercy of the contractors. We worked with a top product-design company, and we believed what they told us in terms of deadlines." As a captain who has navigated liveaboards for 19 years, Lever came up with the idea for Nautilus Lifeline after nearly losing a diver in the Gulf of Alaska three years ago. After investing \$2 million and having a working prototype, he thought the



Nautilus Lifeline

product was 95 percent complete, and decided to market it, starting with DEMA 2010. But then small issues were identified. “We didn’t realize how challenging the last few pieces would be to put together,” said Lever. He delayed shipping for three months last spring but continued the marketing push, believing the product would be ready by summer, and opened up the website, with payment options.

After receiving new prototypes, Lever still wasn’t satisfied, and shipping was delayed another three months. “We started to slow down on our marketing push but were still obligated to attend all the tradeshow,” says Nautilus Lifeline marketing director Jason Crabb. “And from the response, we were very excited about the acceptance of the industry.” However, the Nautilus still wasn’t ready.

Some customers complained online that their credit cards were charged after they clicked “purchase” on the Nautilus Lifeline website. Lever said that was accidental and Crabb said they straightened that out, but on August 18 they issued a statement saying, “When ordering the Nautilus Lifeline from our website, you can place either an order or a pre-order. An order will immediately charge your card for the amount shown when you check out. A pre-order will hold your information, and your card will not be charged until your unit has shipped . . . Due to heavy demand, we may not be fully caught up until the end of October.” Some purchasers were not pleased.

Crabb tells us, “The request for your story came about due to a few people issuing concerns and rumours on online forums.” Actually, an *Undercurrent* reader asked us to look into the shipping delays. Crabb told us “we are quite sure there is the possibility that some competitors are starting fake accounts to write incorrect information about our product.” But most online gripes were about shipping delays; few dissed the product. In fact, it seems most people were waiting with baited breath to get their hands on it. Clearly, Nautilus’ reputation would have benefited had they explained their delays on their website and to their customers, rather than surmise that competitors, not eager divers, were creating the flack.

Anyhow, Lever tells us, Nautilus Lifeline is shipping and that the backorders for 6,000 or so units should be filled by the first week of November. For what the Nautilus Lifeline expects to deliver, the \$299 price tag is reasonable, indeed.

-- Vanessa Richardson

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## Why Divers Panic

### *Malcolm Gladwell explains in his latest book*

When a diver finds himself in an adverse situation underwater, he needs to stop and think about what is the best move to take. For example, he draws on his regulator and he gets no air. Does he free ascend? Rush to his buddy? Rise a few feet and try again? Try to breathe air from his BC? Which move he selects depends upon variables, such as his depth, the proximity of his buddy, and whether there is air remaining in his tank.

A well-trained and experienced divers will know just what to do, while someone more novice may be at a loss and panic, perhaps shooting to the service while holding his breath, or even yanking out his regulator when it provides no air (not an uncommon reaction from divers who die).

Most divers who die could save their own bacon if they didn’t panic -- or choke. In his recent book, *What the Dog Saw*, Malcolm Gladwell devotes a chapter to “The Art of Failure: Why Some People Choke and Others Panic.” He cites interesting examples of Jana Novotna faltering at Wimbledon, Yankee second baseman Chuck Knoblauch finding himself unable to throw to first base any longer, and golfer Greg Norman freezing up during the 1996 Masters Championship. However, for us scuba divers, the story of Epjimia Morpew in a diving class is indeed instructional. Here is what Morpew told Gladwell about her experience:

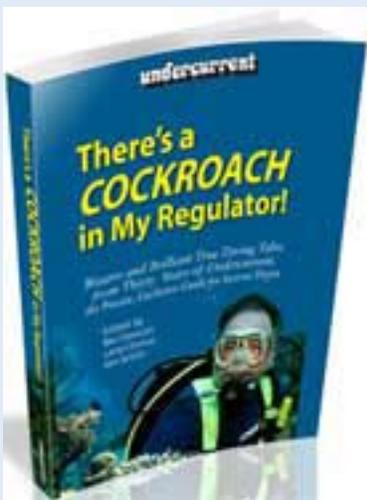
“It was an open-water certification dive in Monterey Bay, California, about 10 years ago. I was 19. I’d been diving for two weeks. This was my first time in the open ocean without the instructor. Just my buddy and I. We had to go about 40 feet down, to the bottom of the ocean, and do an exercise where we took our regulators out of our mouth, picked up a spare one that we had on our vest, and practiced breathing out of the spare. My buddy did hers. Then it was my turn. I removed my regulator. I lifted up my secondary regulator. I put it in my mouth, exhaled, to clear the lines, and then I inhaled, and, to my surprise, it was water. I inhaled water. Then the hose that connected that mouthpiece to my tank, my air source, came unlatched and air from the hose came exploding into my face.

“Right away, my hand reached out for my partner’s air supply, as if I was going to rip it out. It was without thought. It was a physiological response. My eyes are seeing my hand do something irresponsible. I’m fighting with myself. Don’t do it. Then I searched my mind for what I could do. And nothing came to mind. All I could remember was one thing: If you can’t take care of yourself, let your buddy take care of you. I let my hand fall back to my side, and I just stood there.”

“This is a textbook example of panic,” Gladwell summarizes. “In that moment, Morpheus stopped thinking. She forgot that she had another source of air, one that worked perfectly well and that, moments before, she had taken out of her mouth. She forgot that her partner had a working air supply as well, which could easily be shared, and she forgot that grabbing her partner’s regulator would imperil both of them. All she had was her most basic instinct: get air. Stress wipes out short-term memory. People with lots of experience tend not to panic, because when the stress suppresses their short-term memory they still have some residue of experience to draw on. But what did a novice like Morpheus have?”

“Panic also causes what psychologists call perceptual narrowing. In one study, from the early 70s, a group of subjects were asked to perform a visual-acuity task while undergoing what they thought was a 60-foot dive in a pressure chamber. At the same time, they were asked to push a button whenever they saw a small light flash on and off in their peripheral vision. The subjects in the chamber room had much higher heart rates than the control group, indicating that they were under stress. That stress didn’t affect their accuracy at the visual-acuity task, but they were only half as good as the control group at picking up the peripheral light. ‘You tend to focus or obsess on one thing,’ Morpheus says. ‘There’s a famous airplane example, where the landing light went off, and the pilots had no way if the landing gear was down. The pilots were so focused on that light that no one noticed the autopilot had been disengaged, and they crashed the plane.’ Morpheus reached for her buddy’s air supply because it was the only air supply she could see.

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“Panic, in this sense, is the opposite of choking. Choking is about thinking too much. Panic is thinking about too little. Choking is about loss of instinct. Panic is reversing to instinct. They may look the same but they are worlds apart.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I recommend you read the entire chapter to understand fully the phenomena of choking and panic. However, the entire book is filled with exceptional pieces, from pieces on “dog whisperer” Cesar Milan, how we can blame no one for the Challenger disaster, and how smart people are overrated. Gladwell gained fame for *The Tipping Point* and other books. Order his latest through [www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org), and our profits will help save coral reefs.

-- Ben Davison

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## Scuba Snobs' Guide to Dive Etiquette

### *the formerly unspoken rules for good divers to live by*

Sport diving is laden with unspoken rules. We've published most of them over the years, but there is no single resource where the new diver, the first time liveaboard diver, or the spouse of a longtime diver can turn to find them. At least, not until now. Dennis Jacobson has been diving for nearly 15 years, his wife Debbie for 10. Hooked on diving, they've traveled extensively, they've learned the rules, and with two pair of keen eyes, they have observed too many of their fellow divers ignoring the social rules that maintain order and composure in our sport.

So they wrote and self-published a small handbook on the rules of diving, *The Scuba Snobs Guide to Diving Etiquette*, and are kind enough to let us publish a few excerpts. We're only quoting a few paragraphs from this fun and useful book. We suggest you order a couple of copies, and next time you encounter an idiot diver, just slip a copy into his dive bag. It may save your trip.

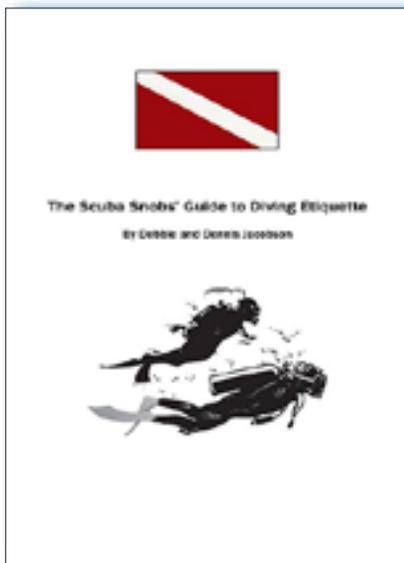
#### **Use a Boat Bag**

This is the primary rule of etiquette for day boat diving. It cannot be overemphasized. For those who don't know, a boat bag is a soft mesh duffel bag that can be collapsed to the size of a shoebox or smaller. It will hold all your gear, and it will not be in the way on the boat.

We were once on a day boat out of Lahaina, Maui, and a new diver had a huge hard case for his equipment that was the size of a steamer trunk. It was full of his gear, and he plopped it right in the middle of the dive deck, and left it there. Asshole! It was a real hazard for anyone trying to move around the boat, and he was in everyone's way as well. Get a boat bag, and you might one day be welcomed back on a dive boat. Not surprisingly, this person had other issues too, discussed in later chapters. Your oversized hard case does not belong on the day boat, and neither does that gear bag you packed all your gear in to put on the airplane, bus, train or car that got you to your destination. These bags are big, heavy, and they **THEY DON'T BELONG ON A BOAT**. Yet we see them constantly. Get a clue. Get a boat bag. There are thousands of scuba retailers who will be very happy to sell you one.

#### **Keep Your Stuff Out of the Camera Bucket**

Most but not all day boats will have a large bucket or barrel filled with fresh water into which cameras and nothing else are placed. These camera buckets give expensive photo and video equipment a safe ride, and keep them out of everyone's way while on board. The camera bucket is not for you to dip your mask in, or to wash off your regulator, computer, BCD or anything else. If you listened to the briefing, you would know that. Dennis once had a person actually dip his BCD and regulator in a camera bucket that contained several expensive pieces of camera and video gear, including his. Strobes were jostled, buttons pushed, general mayhem ensued, yet the Scuba Snobs on board let the offender live. You may not be so lucky. Keep your crap out of the camera bucket.



## Don't Smoke

Here is a simple rule: No smoking. No smoking of anything, at all. Don't even bring smoking materials on board, or a Scuba Snob will see that they hit the wet part of the deck. On a recent dive outing at an unnamed dive destination in Mexico, we had "the torch" puffing away all the way out to the dive sight. He was also the guy who, of course, geared up late, delayed the entry for everyone, and was the first guy out of air. Somehow (no one ever did take full responsibility), his pack of cigarettes hit the bottom of the boat and was soaked. He spent the entire boat ride back to shore trying to light a totally waterlogged cigarette. It was unbelievable. He looked totally ridiculous.

No one wants your smoke destroying the wonderful aroma of the salt air, and if you flick your butt into the ocean, you should be banned from all dive boats forever. Liveboards (see Chapter 4) may have a place for you to engage in your habits, but day boats don't. And why is anyone even smoking at all these days? If you have a one-pack-a-day habit, over the course of a year you are

spending the equivalent of an entire set of scuba gear, including a decent computer, just on your cigarettes. It also adds up to be the equivalent of a dive trip with airfare to many fine Caribbean dive destinations. Do the math. It's your call. Smoking, or Grand Cayman for a week?

## Pee Only Where and When Appropriate

The jury is in. The debate is over. It is okay to pee in your wetsuit when in the ocean. It is okay to climb back on the boat if you wait at least five minutes after peeing in your wetsuit in the ocean before re-boarding. It is not ok to pee in your wetsuit when on the boat. If you are on the boat and have to pee, and there is no head (toilet) on the boat, either hold it or jump in the water and pee. This works best if the boat is not moving and if you tell at least one other person, preferably a crew member, that you are jumping in for a minute. Once you have finished, wait five minutes and then re-board. Guys, it is not okay to lean over the gunwale, pull it out, and let fly. Ever. This is not okay for the ladies either, just in case you were wondering.

## Talk Only When Appropriate and Limit Yourself to Proper Content

On the day boat, it is okay to introduce yourself to other divers and ask where they are from. Polite greetings and exchanges are appropriate. If you lack a dive buddy, it is appropriate to ask others on the boat if they have a buddy and, if not, if they will buddy with you. But don't be a pest about it. We dive together as buddies on every dive when we are both on the boat. If we want more company, we will invite someone to join us. If you ask to join us and we don't want you to, we will turn you down politely, once.

After a dive, it is appropriate to share with others all the cool stuff you saw. That's why we all dive. It is also okay to report any symptoms of decompression sickness or other injury or problems. In fact, always do that. Polite, pleasant and positive conversation is always appropriate. Other stuff is not. Here is a list of conversation don'ts:

- \* Don't bitch at anyone on the boat, including your dive buddy, even if you are married to them.
- \* Don't bitch to or about anyone on the boat crew
- \* Don't bitch about the weather, the visibility, currents or anything else beyond the control of the people you paid to take your diving today.
- \* Don't use profanity at us or anyone else. It's bad manners.
- \* Don't tell everyone how your last dive here or elsewhere was so much better than this dive.
- \* Don't talk so loud that people not in your conversation end up being a part of it.
- \* Don't offer unsolicited advice to any other diver unless you are a licensed and insured divemaster or instructor and see the other person doing something dangerous and wrong. You have no doubt been on the boat with the person who has maybe 10 dives but can't stop telling people what to do and how to do it. And they are usually wrong.

If someone asks you a question, and you are competent to answer or assist, then ok. But it might be more appropriate to direct them to a professional on board, preferably one who is being paid to work this particular dive outing.

\* Don't criticize other divers. A Scuba Snob is allowed to criticize other divers, but really only does so on rare occasions. We prefer to talk about them after we have escaped from their presence. We hear husbands and wives speaking critically to each other before and after dives. Sometimes a parent will yell at or be critical of a child. Sometimes it's a future ex-boyfriend criticizing his for-the-moment girlfriend. When any of this happens, it can totally suck all the positive energy off of the boat, and even out of the surrounding ocean. One of the reasons we love diving is that the people are almost always fun. We can share the diving experience together, and it's all good. Until someone goes negative. Don't be that person.

Sadly, we have lived through too many examples of this to list, but you violators out there know who you are. If you do not qualify as a Scuba Snob, don't try and tell someone else how to set up their equipment, how to dive or how to navigate the dive sight about to be explored.

We are sure that, like us, you have been on a dive boat where someone on board felt they knew it all, and insisted on sharing it. One time on a day boat off of Maui (it seems a lot of bad examples have happened there, maybe because we dive there a lot) we had one of these people on board. Conversation revealed that this was that person's second dive trip, and they last dove about a year earlier at some Caribbean location. After telling Dennis all about the best equipment to have (just like his), how to put on equipment once it was assembled, and showing off his 10-inch dive knife, niftily strapped to the outside of his right calf (really), Dennis had enough, said thanks for sharing, and turned away. Of course, this was the diver who did not turn on his air, had inadequate weight to descend, and was generally a buzz kill for everyone on the dive.

## The Death of Steve Irwin, Redux

It has been more than five years since the famed "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin died while snorkeling at Batt Reef in Queensland, Australia, during a shoot for a series called *Ocean's Deadliest*. He swam too close to a stingray that thrust its barb into his chest, piercing his heart and killing him shortly after. (We wrote about the incident, and the backlash, in our October 2006 issue, which you can read at [www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org))

The South Pacific Underwater Medical Society (SPUMS) collects diving fatalities in Australian waters every year in its *Diving and Environmental Medicine* journal, although it typically publishes them a few years later, as researchers need to compile the reports from witnesses, police and coroners to create their case studies and analyze the results and factors leading to the deaths. Below is what SPUMS wrote --and concluded -- about Irwin's death.

Although the coronial papers about this incident are unavailable (at the request of the victim's family), some of the media reports combined with other enquiries provided useful details.

This victim was a 44-year-old male who was apparently fit and healthy, and an experienced snorkeler. His death

occurred while he was making a documentary film about marine life. He was snorkeling and, at the time of the incident, was reportedly standing on, or floating above the reef in water of a depth of about five feet of seawater. He was very near a large stingray (bull ray), reportedly with a wingspan of approximately three feet across. He was positioned to enable a nearby cameraman to film both the stingray and himself in the same frame. The cameraman was in front of the stingray, and the victim was behind and above the ray when the ray turned around, rose and flicked its barbed tail, hitting the victim forcefully to the left of his sternum. He was seen to pull the barb out but then collapsed. Resuscitation was attempted on the boat and continued on shore, but was unsuccessful.

Autopsy: There is no autopsy report available but other sources report that death was found to have resulted from cardiac tamponade.

Comment: A tragic death resulting from the victim positioning himself too closely over and above a stingray, and likely causing it to feel threatened and trapped. The shallow depth placed the victim within range of the stingray's barbed tail. Removal of an embedded stingray spine is generally discouraged in the first-aid setting, as it is likely to further increase the trauma caused by the rear-facing serrations, and 'unplug' the wound. However, it is unknown whether this act made any difference to the outcome of this incident.

## Don't Feed Anything to Anything that Lives in the Ocean

We feel very strongly about this. The only real exception is if you puke in the ocean because that is really a part of the ecosystem. We don't go on shark dives where the concessionaire feeds the sharks. We don't feed frozen peas to fish or eels. We don't smear squeeze cheese on mermaid statues to get the fish to look like they are kissing the mermaid. We have seen all of these things done. While we have to admit that the cheese on the mermaid at Sunset Reef in Grand Cayman was pretty cool, with large grey angelfish looking like they were kissing her on the lips, it was still wrong. If you feel differently, we won't dive with you, and you can never be a Scuba Snob.

Dennis fed the fish inadvertently once on a dive off of Lanai, and not by puking. Focusing on taking a photo, he swam into the side of a lava tube and gashed his head pretty deeply. He bled a lot. It looked like an ink cloud from an octopus, but apparently it was less noxious because every little butterfly fish and yellow tang within a mile descended on him. He looked like he was in the middle of a swarm of bees. If you really want to feed the fish, go ahead and open up a vein. But other than that (and puking), if you are with a Scuba Snob, there is no fish feeding.

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These are just a few chestnuts roasted by the authors. There's plenty more, so be sure to order your copy by going to [www.undercurrent.org/UCnow/bookpicks.shtml](http://www.undercurrent.org/UCnow/bookpicks.shtml) and buying it at Amazon via our website. All profits we make from book sales go to saving coral reefs.

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# Shark Hunt or Witch Hunt?

## *Aussie dive operators call for shark killing rampages*

A fatal shark attack on a scuba diver off Western Australia last month triggered a knee-jerk witch hunt by local authorities. American diver George Thomas Wainwright, 32, was attacked while diving solo off a boat near Rottneest Island. Two friends in a nearby boat noticed a burst of bubbles, followed by a plume of blood, before their friend's lifeless body floated to the surface. They reported that a 10-foot great white shark appeared as they tried to pull Wainwright's body from the water. The same shark reportedly nudged their boat as they headed for shore.

This was the third fatal shark attack off Australia's southwest coast in less than two months. Earlier, a bodyboarder and a swimmer were believed to have been taken by great whites. The former had his legs severed, and only the swimmer's torn trunks were found. Typically, Australia averages a little more than one fatal shark attack a year.

Almost immediately, a local dive operator called on the state government to kill sharks that pose a threat to humans. "The nuisance sharks, the problem sharks that move into an area and are aggressive, should be dispatched to remove the risk of future attack," Rockingham Wild Encounters director Terry Howson told the Associated Press. "It's absolutely hurting the tourist trade. Australia is getting a name for itself as being full of dangerous animals." Howson has been campaigning for government action on sharks since one of his tour guides was attacked last year.

Sounding like an outtake from the movie *Jaws*, Western Australia Premier Colin Barnett rose to the bait and declared that his government would consider shark culls in the future. Despite the great white's endangered status, state authorities have been allowed to kill sharks that threaten humans since 2000, when a Perth businessman was killed in front of horrified beachgoers.

This legal exemption was exercised for the first time when Department of Fisheries crews set six lines with tuna-baited hooks off Rottneest Island to catch the predatory perpetrator, even while Department Manager Tony Cappelluti acknowledged how illogical this action was. He told the Associated Press, "If the shark's in that vicinity, it may or may not take those baited hooks." Conversely, Cappelluti conceded, "Because the hooks are baited, there is a possibility they might attract a shark back to the area. We don't want to leave them there for a long period of time."

## The Fins Sharks Like Best

On a baited shark dive during the seasonal sardine run this summer at South Africa's Aliwal Shoal, Paolo Stanchi, a 22-year-old American research diver, became part of the food group. He was bitten by a 10-foot-long dusky shark, and his left leg and both hands were badly mauled. (The boat captain saved his life by stemming the flow of blood, and Stanchi was airlifted to Durban for surgery).

What made the sharks go after Stanchi? Blue Wilderness, the dive operator, believes it was his fins. Stanchi was wearing split fins with grey and black stripes, and Blue Wilderness owner Mark Addison says the shark apparently bit at his fins in a case of mistaken identity, thinking they were really a small shoal of fish.

That's why Jim Abernethy, who runs his Scuba Adventure shark dive trips in the Bahamas, recommends his divers don't wear split fins. "They're easier to swim with but you have to kick more. You have to kick faster to get the same speed as when wearing normal fins. That means more movement, and that attracts sharks. The faster you fin, the more you look like prey,

and sharks come in to investigate." And on a shark dive, the last thing you want to do is to attract attention to yourself."

Ralph Collier, head of the Shark Research Committee and author of *Shark Attacks of the 20th Century*, says the shark might have struck Stanchi's fins because they were closest to it when approaching the bait. "Sharks frequently bite limbs before [they bite] the torso, especially in the case of divers, because they are more readily available to the shark as it nears the subject. Further, I would assume that the vibration patterns emitted by the split fins is different than that produced by a natural prey, the sardines. Therefore, additional motivation could have been the difference between the fin and prey vibrations, and not that they duplicated one another."

Both Collier and Abernethy say the case of 'mistaken identity' is overemphasized. All pelagic sharks have good vision. If they didn't, they wouldn't be such great hunters - - and far more humans would have ended up as shark food by mistake. "In clear water, they'll realize what you are before they get there," says Abernethy. "And they definitely don't want us."

So, why bother? That question was taken up by scientists around the world who warned against overreacting to this unusual spate of attacks. Barbara Weuringer, a University of Western Australia marine zoologist, pointed out that there was no way of telling which shark was the killer without opening its stomach. "It sounds a little bit like taking revenge, and we're talking about an endangered species." She pointed out that the increase in shark attacks could reflect the human population increase in the southwest.

Over 100 international scientists signed a petition against a shark hunt, challenging the notion that targeting an individual shark would enhance human safety and urging state authorities to "realize that a shark cull would be disastrous not only to our marine environment but also Australia's reputation as a world leader in marine conservation." One of the signers was George Burgess, curator of the International Shark Attack File at the Florida Museum of Natural History. He told *Undercurrent* that the chances of a single shark being involved in all three recent fatalities are "slim to none." He pointed out that Wainwright was diving in a vicinity where sharks are currently following migrating whales, and that most great whites range up to 40 miles in a day. "Culling is folly," says Burgess. "The attackers are long gone." Instead, he suggests greater public education about sharks and safe ocean practices to reduce the risk of further attacks.

Shark conservationists have also waded into this controversy. David McGuire, director of the California-based nonprofit Shark Stewards, wrote Premier Barnett to warn that "Indiscriminate fishing for sharks will result in undesired casualties among other species and sharks that were not responsible for the incidents." Instead, he recommended spotting from the air, beach watches, posting advisories, beach closures if required and educating the public in proper shark avoidance - all solutions applied successfully in Australia and elsewhere.

If you'd like to protest the shark-culling strategy, you can sign a petition at [www.thepetitionsite.com/5/stop-the-white-shark-cull-off-west-australia](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/5/stop-the-white-shark-cull-off-west-australia).

Larry Clinton coauthored *There's a Cockroach in my Regulator* with *Undercurrent* publisher Ben Davison. It's available to buy at [www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org)

# Nobody Wants a Bursting Scuba Hose

## *questions arise about Miflex's high-pressure hoses*

Miflex, based in the U.K., produces double-braided polyester-high pressure hoses, claiming they are more flexible, durable, stronger and, very important to traveling divers these days, weigh less than other high pressure hoses, shaving ounces off packed dive gear. But there now is a question about how safe its hoses are.

We got our first comments about Miflex's high-pressure (HP) hoses from reader Mike Cavanaugh (Bellaire, TX), who had two of them break within 24 hours during a dive trip to Sipadan-Mabul Resort. "While checking subsequent tanks with my personal regulator after dinner, a Miflex HP hose broke at the gauge console. The resort manager arranged a golf cart to carry us to the dive shop, which promptly changed the hose out. But then another Miflex HP hose also bust at the console the following day on the boat. These Miflex hoses are only two years old, and I am quite anal about taking care of my gear, so the hoses were not abused. I have quit using Miflex for HP hoses."

Cavanaugh's not alone. In our October e-newsletter, we asked subscribers if they too had had problems with HP hoses. A few said they had. One is Tony Anschutz, owner of the ScubaTony dive shop in Cozumel, who had bought the Miflex HP hose four months ago and used it on approximately 100 dives. After surfacing from one, he was changing tanks and opening the valve on a fresh one, when the HP hose blew out in. "Not at either end but right in the middle. I contacted the U.S. distributor, and a replacement hose was sent out quickly, so customer service is great. I use Miflex hoses for my regulator but I would be hesitant to recommend the HP hose, due to catastrophic failure."

Richard Burr (Dover, DE) was one reader who had not had any problems, but he was still concerned. "I've been using the Miflex HP hoses on my rebreather and bailout regulators for three years now and never had any issues. But I'm an active member of dive forums and I see way too many reports of the HP hoses failing. Most are at the crimp points, but there are a fair number at in the middle of the hoses. Hard to say if the hoses were abused in one way or another, but there are almost no complaints of standard HP hoses bursting. In my mind, no one should be using these hoses until some real improvements are made, and I'm not talking about the silly hose protector MiFlex put on to "address" the issue.

The notable issue around Miflex HP hose bursts is that the first generation of hoses produced had a swaged metal ferrule at the ends. The burst problem occurred there, at the end of the metal ferrule, either from unequal stresses or the hose getting bent hard against the end of the ferrule. Miflex's newer version now has a rubber-like stress protector over the metal ferrule, relieving that stress point. But there's still concern, as Burr points out above, whether that addition does the trick. (We e-mailed Miflex three times and called their U.S. distributor, XS Scuba, to ask about their hose fixers and to address their concerns, but they didn't reply by press time).

Dive shop owners are also split on whether to sell Miflex HP hoses. Mark Derrick, owner of Dive Gear Express in Pompano Beach, FL, notes on his website that Miflex had problems with the hose failing at the fitting, but the problems have been resolved, and he can't find difference in quality between Miflex's hose and that of its competitor, Phantom. "We've sold 900 of these hoses since 2009 and have had roughly 20 returns but the main reason is because customers were very nervous about how thin the hose was, and so they had thought they were weaker," Derrick told Undercurrent. "But the failure rate is in line with ordinary HP hoses." He thinks Miflex's stress-protection solution does the trick. "It also makes the hose work in standard boots and fills because it increases the HP hose's diameter to that of a standard hose."

Derrick thinks the concern about the hoses is overblown. "Once something starts on the Internet, the focus increases, but that doesn't make it true. There's a lot of chatter about the problem, but there's actually not a lot of problems."

Joel Silverstein, vice-president of Tech Diving Limited in Lake Havasu, AZ, disagrees. “We’ve seen enough field reports about Miflex hoses leaking in the fills, that we as a retailer chose to no longer sell them. Even after Miflex’s fix, I still hear complaints about them leaking.” He says his shop doesn’t sell hose protectors “because they don’t protect hoses, they’re never installed properly and they typically weaken the fill area when the hose is pulled and stretched into its protector.”

He recommends divers go for the Phoenix HP hose, which is thicker than a Miflex hose . “We’ve had zero of their hoses come back, I have them on my personal gear and have seen no bubbling whatsoever, unlike on our internal evaluations of Miflex hoses.”

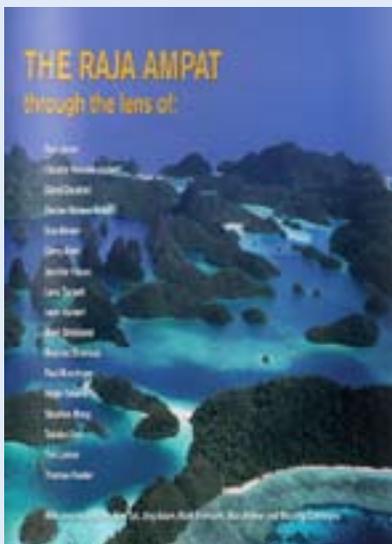
No matter what type or brand of hose you buy, remember that they’re just like car tires – they won’t last forever, so they need to be replaced regularly. Silverstein says the average lifespan of a hose is five to 10 years, based on your number of dives. “Most divers are under the misconception that a hose should last forever,” says Silverstein. “It’s a consumable item, just like wetsuits or drysuit seals. Any rubber product put under stress should be replaced on a regular basis.”

-- Vanessa Richardson

## Two Reads on Raja Ampat

Like Grand Cayman in the 70s, Raja Ampat in West Papua, Indonesia, is the must-go place for divers. Of course, not everyone can afford such an excursion, but for those who can, one new book provides an excellent guide, and another provides enough photographs so you’ll know what you’re missing.

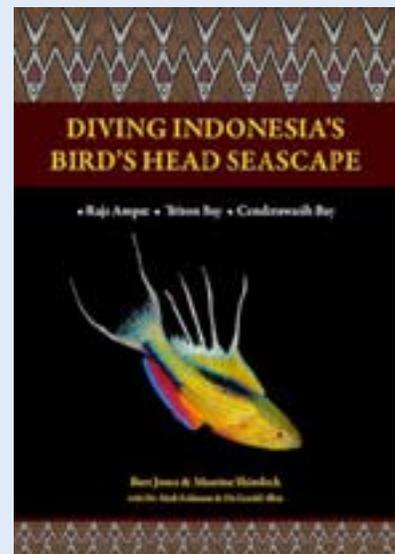
For armchair divers, the 288-page coffee table-sized book *Raja Ampat, through the Lens of*, with a score of photo contributors listed, hit the market early last year and lets you see the kinds of critters you only read about -- the pygmy seahorse, blue ring octopus, picture dragonet, archerfish, as well as the seascapes of amazing hard and soft coral. I especially like the many above-surface photos, where the wildlife, villages, people and spectacular islands provide an understanding of the uniqueness and precious environment. The text is informative, as are the bios of the



nearly two dozen famous shooters, including David Doubilet, Mark Strickland, Burt Jones and Maurine Shimlock, Gerry Alan and Rogers Steene. The list price is \$61 but the 200-plus pages of color photos from these pros are well worth the price. To order, go to [www.undercurrent.org](http://www.undercurrent.org) and click on

‘Books.’ Our profit goes to preserve coral reefs.

For travelers, Burt Jones and Maurine Shimlock have spent more than 1000 hours chronicling the wonders of Raja Ampat and have produced *Diving Indonesia’s Bird’s Head Seascape*, a 176-page paperbound book that describes 130 dive sites of Raja Ampat, Triton Bay and Cenderawasih Bay, while offering practical information about the area. The detailed descriptions of the sites, complete



with GPS coordinates, explain the terrain, how to dive the site, and the kinds of animals, coral and critters you can expect. As a tourist diver, you’ll be riding along with guides, so you can only hope your leader knows the sites as well as Burt and Maurine. If not, their book will help you advise your guide -- better leave it with him afterwards -- and help you complete your log book accurately once you have surfaced. A number of excellent photographs will help you identify many of the critters you will encounter. If you have been to Raja Ampat, or dream about going, this thoughtful and well-illustrated book is for you. The list price is \$35, and the book is available through us at [www.undercurrent.org/bookpicks](http://www.undercurrent.org/bookpicks) .

# Flotsam & Jetsam

**A Wetsuit for Closer Encounters.** Want to get nearer the marine life? A New Zealand company says it has developed a “stealth wetsuit” for divers to do so. FOB Direct says it has created a carbon fabric called the Hecs Stealthscreen. The fabric supposedly conceals the faint electric signals emitted by humans and detected by underwater creatures. It has been incorporated into wetsuits made by Xcel, and will debut at the DEMA trade show currently going on in Florida. We’re as skeptical about it as we are about the shark-repelling magnets we wrote about last month, but the Pelagic Shark Research Foundation has endorsed the wetsuits, stating they’ve allowed their researchers to get closer to sharks. The wetsuits are scheduled to go on sale in February for \$600. ([www.xcelwetsuits.com](http://www.xcelwetsuits.com))

**A 24-Hour Mantra of “I Must Survive.”** A Japanese divemaster swam 20 miles to shore in 24 hours after being abandoned by his boat. Hishashi Koze, 39, was doing a routine wreck dive 50 minutes off Borneo’s Santubong peninsula with two other divers, but when the boatman lost sight of their air bubbles, he assumed they were in trouble and went for help. Koze was left alone after trying to swim after the boat and losing sight of the two other divers (who were picked up a fishing boat). Koze struck for shore, swimming backstroke through the afternoon and night. “I kept thinking, ‘I must survive,’” Koze told *The Star* of Malaysia. He followed the stars at night, as well as the current’s direction and his compass, until he reached Borneo Island in Malaysia. Asked if he would dive again, Koze said, “Oh yes. Maybe in a week.”

**Supermodel too Scared to Dive.** In the opposite category of fearless, hardcore divers is Kate Moss. The English supermodel pulled out of an openwater dive course during her honeymoon in the South of France. A source told the *Daily Mirror*, “Kate has been snorkeling before. She was keen to get a formal qualification, did some of the

classroom-based stuff and was really getting into it. But then she got convinced she was going to bump into a giant, scary fish, like a shark, and began to get nervous. When a school of tropical fish swam by, Kate got a bit terrified by one of the bigger, grey ones. Pals were calling her ‘Skate Moss’ all day.” Moss quit the course and spent the rest of her honeymoon suntanning on a yacht.

**The Oldest Air.** Scientists at Australia’s national science agency thought they had found the oldest air in the southern hemisphere when they opened up the dive tanks a Melbourne man had filled in 1968. But it turns out several other Australians also kept tanks that were filled as early as the 1950s. Now that air is being used for climate change research. Scientist David Etheridge told *The World* radio program that the tank contents are filling an invaluable gap in his studies of Antarctic ice cores, helping him see how the air enclosed in them has changed in the past 50 years.

**Two New World Records.** A Florida dive instructor’s recent dive into Lake David has been recognized by the World Records Academy as setting the new world record for the longest dive in open freshwater. Allen Sherrod from Groveland, FL, stayed under for five days, or more officially, 120 hours, 14 minutes and 11 seconds. Sherrod, 47, is also hoping to get into the Guinness World Records, but the timetable for that is unclear. The current Guinness record was set by Jerry Hall in 2004 for sitting submerged in Tennessee’s Watauga Lake for 120 hours, 1 minute and 9 seconds. If you care, the world record for the longest open saltwater dive is 48 hours, 8 minutes and 17 seconds. Meanwhile, over at the Waen Rhydd Bog in Wales, a new world record was set in the 26th World Bog Snorkelling Championships. Andrew Holmes from West Yorkshire, England, set a new time of one minute, 24 seconds, shattering last year’s record by more than six seconds as he swam two lengths of a 180-foot-long trench. The record time for this sport has fallen by 14 seconds in the last two years. Event organizer Lindsey Katteringham said the speed of competitors through the brackish waters was due to technique. “You have to be able to snorkel when you can’t see where you’re going, and you don’t want to take a mouthful of the water. And you have to be good with flippers because there is no recognized swimming strokes allowed.”

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