
Sipadan. However, there are rumors that the government is considering moving all dive operations to a nearby island (just within eyesight on a clear day). That would be the end of the best shore diving in the world.

Not quite as alarming, but still of concern, is the news about Sipadan's night diving. An *In Depth* reviewer recently returned from a live-aboard trip. One of the guests on board had just come from Sipadan. He was 40 years old, certified in 1979, an excellent diver who had logged 1,000 dives. He had not been allowed to night dive with Sipadan Divers until he took a PADI night diving course at considerable cost. As

the reviewer put it: "I've been diving for 20 years with a Basic Diver certification, and I would resent some snot-nosed punk telling me I could not night dive until I upped some money for another course."

It turns out that Sipadan dive operators are nervous about the recent death of a Japanese diver who entered a cavern along the wall on a night dive, got lost, and drowned. Warning signs have been posted at the cave entrance, but everyone is still jumpy about night diving.

I did talk with one diver who had stayed at Sipadan Diving Lodge and dived with Borneo

Divers. He told me, "As far as night diving is concerned, as long as you have logged night dives, you can go out on your own, no problem with Borneo Divers." Night diving is great; there are lots of bumphead parrotfish, flashlight fish, and very colorful feeding corals, among other things worth a lot of trouble to see.

Other dive operators on the island are being vague about their exact policies on night diving. If night diving is important to you — and on Sipadan, it should be — I would suggest clarifying what the qualifications are with your dive operation or travel agent before booking Sipadan.

J. Q.

Accidents and Incidents

Learning from others' mistakes

From time to time we report on case studies of divers' deaths so that we may all learn from them. The cases cited here come from analyses of deaths in 1993 by the Divers Alert Network. The facts, though edited, are from DAN's reports; the commentary is ours.

River Diving

River diving is a specialty for which experience gained at Bonaire or Belize is no qualification. River flow is treacherous, rocks are hazards, and visibility can be a killer.

A 34-year-old woman, diving in a river looking for shark teeth with her boyfriend, failed to surface on time. Searchers found

her body the next day. Her tank was out of air and a fishline was wrapped around her regulator. A contributing factor may have been the four beers she was said to have consumed before diving. If rivers are taboo for ocean-certified divers, this untrained and unwise diver had little chance.

Iced Regulators

The more extreme the conditions, the more important it is to use a regulator that can handle those conditions. Diving in very cold water, for example, presents special hazards.

An instructor was performing a checkout dive with one student in a quarry with 45° water. The instructor wore 19 pounds of

weight, the trainee 22 pounds. Neither made it back to the surface. Their bodies were recovered at 74 feet. The student's tank had 1,900 psi, the instructor's 175 psi. It's not clear what happened, but the best guess is that one or both regulators iced and they used the instructor's equipment, which free-flowed until the tank was empty.

Falling Asleep

An inexperienced diver with a history of narcolepsy — a disease that makes one fall asleep uncontrollably — was participating in an underwater wedding. Using 29 pounds of weight, he made an unplanned rapid descent to 50 feet. He lost his regulator, began to ascend rapidly, became uncon-

scious, then sank to the bottom. He was brought to the surface but could not be resuscitated.

Live Wires

Divers should learn as much as possible about potential hazards in any location before diving. This is especially true when diving in unusual places. A 46-year-old man disappeared while diving with a companion in a freshwater lake. His body was found in contact with an underwater electrical cable.

Invisible Demons

A 33-year-old diver who had penetrated a deep wreck with other divers developed an unknown problem. His buddy attempted to help, but the victim struggled and knocked the buddy's mask off. By the time the buddy recovered, the victim had disappeared. His body was recovered the next day. Nitrogen narcosis was believed to have affected his judgement.

A 24-year-old male diving in 15 feet of water inexplicably began ripping off his equipment. He fought off rescuers (two other experienced and three inexperienced divers), sank, and drowned. Panic, a consistent killer of inexperienced divers, was the only ready explanation for the diver's actions.

Rough Conditions

Smart divers know when to quit. When conditions turn out worse than expected, they overcome their ego and abort the dive. Those less smart often get into trouble.

An experienced 40-year-old woman was diving with a companion in rough, cold northeastern coastal water. They ran into difficulty as they swam toward shore on the surface. When they

reached a breakwater, the companion removed his gear to help the woman, but the current pulled her away. A nearby fisherman retrieved her, but she had drowned.

A newly certified diver, diving with a companion in a large northern lake, ran low on air in

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rough water. Waves forced him against a breakwater. Unable to get out, he ran out of air, aspirated, passed out, and drowned.

Big Fish

Sharks seldom attack divers, but experts speculate that a tiger shark killed a woman who went over a wall with a group on a night dive. She and her buddy descended past the planned depth. Her buddy was escorted to the surface by the dive guide. She was not seen again. Another guide saw a light descending faster than a diver could descend. Her body was recovered with severe tiger shark bites.

The Last of the Blue Water Hunters, a fascinating book by Carlos Eyles, describes harrowing incidents in which free divers who had speared fish weighing several hundred pounds had to drop their weapons to get to the surface. One 39-year-old spearfisherman tried to hang on and was dragged to 205 feet. He surfaced rapidly, then returned to 60 feet to attempt in-water recompression. He was transported to a local medical center, where he died.

Silent Collision

A 39-year-old woman and her husband were reef diving. They became separated on the bottom, and although her husband was unaware of any problem, she did not come to the surface on time. She was found drowned three hours later. Her tank contained air, and her BC was operable — but her mask was missing, apparently kicked off inadvertently by her husband as he swam a few kicks away looking for lobster.

Too Many Weights

On a recent trip to the Cayman Islands I noticed that three-fourths of the divers I saw were using too much weight. Too many deaths occur because divers do not manage their weight properly.

For example, five divers exploring an ocean canyon reached bottom at 115 feet. Visibility dropped because of the silt they had stirred up, so they returned to 40 feet, only to realize that one diver was missing. They searched for him without success. His body was found later at 147 feet. He wore a 22-pound weight belt, which he had not released, and double 62-cubic-foot cylinders. Although his BC was partly inflated, his body was still negatively buoyant. He had drowned.

A couple diving in the tropics had trouble with buoyancy control. They surfaced, submerged, sank, and were never seen again.

A diver who had completed four days of deep decompression diving at a tropical resort made his final dive to 340 feet. On ascent, he became unconscious, then sank due to negative buoyancy. His body was never recovered.

Ben Davison