

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Nai'a, Fiji

bright diving, weather permitting, good service all the time

IN THIS ISSUE:

Nai'a, Fiji.....	1
Stung Divers: Skip Vinegar, Use Hot Water	3
Baani Adventure's Lethal Air Compressor.....	4
Bahamas, Bonaire, Canada..	6
Three Caribbean Hubs That Leave Dive Bags Behind..	7
Update on <i>Shear Water</i> Shark Incident.....	8
19 Hours Adrift in Australia .	9
Poseidon Dive Gear Recall .	10
First It's Sharks, Then It's Lethal Lizards.....	11
Last Word on Tipping.....	12
"Pad" Your Camera Gear ..	13
Fastest Fins for Divers	14
Diver Charged With Killing Wife On Honeymoon ...	15
Flotsam & Jetsam	16

www.undercurrent.org

Editorial Office:

Ben Davison
Publisher and Editor
Undercurrent
3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102
Sausalito, CA 94965
BenDavison@undercurrent.org

Dear Fellow Diver:

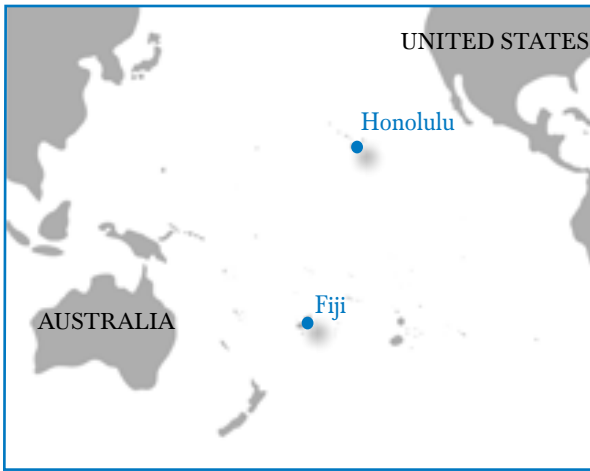
Fiji is acclaimed for the vibrant colors of its corals but it wasn't until the third day of my ten-day dive trip that I saw them. The clouds had cleared a bit when I jumped off the skiff onto a site called Mt. Mutiny. With visibility of 30 feet, I finned next to abundant yellow, gold, purple and lavender soft coral hanging from the steep wall where several white-tipped sharks lingered, and I even startled a resting turtle. Large schools of blue fusiliers and yellow damsels cascaded around me in the shallower depths. Now that's what I had come to see.

Still, some of my dives were -- to use a colorful word here -- crappy. I learned one rule that every diver should know -- you can't predict the weather when you book months in advance. I booked my trip for early May, thinking I was safe from Fiji's official November to April rainy season, but the storms decided to hang around. I spent nearly \$4,000 to dive under cloudy skies and in afternoon rainstorms. I can't fault the Nai'a for that. I last dived Fiji in 2000, enjoying healthy, vibrant corals, multiple pelagics and unique critters, so at least I knew what I was missing. Many of my dives this time were bad-weather duds, but when the sun did show -- ah, the color, the color!

From the moment I stepped aboard Nai'a, the Hawaiian word for dolphin, all signs pointed to a colorful trip. It was a veritable rainbow at Lautoka on Viti Levu's northwest coast - bright shipping containers stacked on the docks, golden sun, emerald hills, inviting deep blue water. My consolation when surfacing from murky dives was



The 120-foot *Nai'a*



that I was pampered aboard a well-run, luxury dive boat. *Nai'a* is a 120-foot steel-hulled motorsailer built in the mid 70s -- Rob Barrel and sister Alexx Edwards turned it into a live-aboard catering primarily to Americans. The mainsail was partially raised for stabilization but the boat was powered by motor for the trip. Nine cabins with private heads and individual A/C accommodate 18 divers. My clean cabin had two portholes, ample shelf space, and plenty of room to walk around. On the queen bed was a bright patterned sulu, a Fijian sarong to wear around the boat, but I wish I had had more than one pillow to prop myself up for reading. My shower was big enough for two but a grip bar would be good in case the boat lurches.

The 17 other divers were Americans, most of them a Colorado dive group. The leader owned a dive shop named Beaver Divers, a sleazy name he defended by saying the shop is based in Beaver Creek, although his business card stated Vail. After the usual get-acquainted bragging about dive experience and exotic trips, our Swiss cruise director and divemaster Sonia got us in the water for a 5 p.m. check-out dive at Samu Reef, just outside Lautoka Harbor, the boat's home port. The gray, murky site was not a good intro, but Captain Johnathan told me it would improve. After a dinner of filet mignon, green beans and roasted potatoes, we motored northeast to Bligh Water. I awoke to an orange and pink sunrise which quickly clouded over, and I barely saw the sun again for the rest of the trip. It was cloudy, windy and rained heavily on several afternoons.

Nasi Yalodina, Fiji's only wreck, is a hospital ship that went down 10 years ago and slips deeper every year -- its stern is currently at 100 feet with the bow at 80 feet. I swam past large bat fish before the wreck came into view but a screaming current and an annoying wrasse that insisted on cleaning my mask made me head back to the reef, colorless in the overcast sky.

At least the antics of my fellow divers were colorful as we all tried to make the best of the ho-hum diving so far. There was a pull-up contest between 50-year-old Tony and 75-year-old Brad, and the old guy won! The language, too, was colorful when divers became frustrated with strong currents and murky visibility. After a difficult dive at Cat's Meow, a site with coral-encrusted swim-throughs, my buddy and I waited on the surface in heavy swells for 15 minutes. I struggled with the boat-issued safety sausage that wouldn't open, blew a whistle and sounded the Dive Alert, but the skiff was merely a speck on the horizon. Finally my buddy ripped the sausage with his knife to get it inflated and we were picked up. When I showed Sonia the ripped sausage and said, "This is a piece of s**t," her response was, "Everybody should dive with one." Huh?

Sonia speaks six languages and her English is good but I often had to ask questions to clarify during announcements and dive briefings. She gave interesting, easier-to-follow lectures several mornings about reef creatures. She was great at finding the tiniest critters like crinoid shrimp. Eddie, the other divemaster, also had a sharp eye - he found a banded pipefish that they claim hasn't been scientifically identified so the crew named it "*Nai'a* pipefish." The remainder of the 14-person crew, many of them veterans, were

<i>Nai'a</i> , Fiji	
Diving (<i>experienced</i>)	★★★★1/2
Diving (<i>beginners</i>)	★★★★
Snorkeling	★★★
Accommodations	★★★★
Food	★★★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★
★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent	
<i>Worldwide Scale</i>	

friendly Fijians who serenaded us on deck with ukuleles and guitars and put on a kava party, causing some divers to sleep through the next morning's dive.

All cabins are below the main deck, accessed from the salon by a steep staircase with narrow treads -- descend backwards and hold on. There is no deck head, so after a dive one had to tackle the stairs while still wet -- an accident waiting to happen. The salon/dining area is tight; when I napped on the banquette-type benches or spread my books and computer on the tables, I had to move everything before mealtime. There's a wide sun deck up top, but no shade -- not a good place for paleskins.

The prep deck is in the center of the boat and has lots of room to suit up and store gear in individual tubs. On the benches, dive briefings took place and divers suited up, bantering off-color stories about Viagra, lawyers, and a joke about both. The dedicated photo room is adjacent with plenty of charging stations, shelf space and room to move. Air tanks were available for blow-drying camera equipment, along with a cameras-only wash bin.

Once tanks were assigned, and BCDs and regulators set up, crew took them to the rear dive deck; I never handled my tank again. Some of the Colorado group were certified solo divers and carried several yellow pony bottles, looking like they were lit up in lights. Because everyone was using Nitrox, it took crew a longer time to fill tanks, especially the mass of pony bottles. That cut down on my air time -- sometimes I was diving with 2,800 psi instead of 3,000. Some dive times were delayed by 15 minutes because tanks were still being filled. But when underwater, I could meander on my own without having to follow a guide.

The two Zodiacs were manned by Mo and Joe, both attentive and helpful, who took my tank while I was still in the water and released a sturdy ladder so I could climb aboard. Joe usually ran me back to the boat without my having to wait for other divers. Back on deck, I took advantage of two hot-water deck showers and always-ready threadbare deck towels that didn't absorb much.

At the site E-6, I back-rolled into the water and was met by a huge school of barracuda before I began investigating caverns and swim-throughs covered with sea fans and soft corals, a photographer's wide-angle dream. In the rubble, I found orange and black nudibranchs and a big-eyed, red and green manta shrimp. No current and good visibility, but those vivid reds and pinks for which Fiji is famous disappeared under the cloud cover.

Each morning, we made meal choices, choosing from two selections for breakfast and lunch, and three for dinner. A pre-breakfast of cereal, juice and toast was set out

Stung Divers: Skip the Vinegar, Use Hot Water

In the "Sea Lice Season" article from our April issue, we recommended divers feeling the burn of sea lice should immediately apply a mix of alcohol and vinegar, followed by hydrocortisone cream, to reduce the pain. Subscriber and emergency physician Ted Shieh, M.D. (Chicago, IL) wrote in to say medical experts have changed these recommendations and the consensus now is immediate water immersion.

"Treatment of exposure to thimble jellyfish larvae is the same as stings from jellyfish, fire corals, sea urchins, anemones and fish -- soak or rinse the affected areas in a warm-water bath or shower with the temperature as hot as tolerable, usually 112 to 120 degrees Fahrenheit," says Shieh. "The treatment should continue until painful symptoms subside, up to 90 minutes, although 10 minutes of a warm shower or soak is adequate for most stings. Having been stung by numerous sea jellies and sea lice, I can attest to the effectiveness of a hot shower."

The rationale: Because most marine animals' toxins can be destroyed by heat, hot water can destroy the venom both inside and outside the skin. "Vinegar can only neutralize stings that didn't penetrate the skin, but it can be used only if it's immediately available and prior to a hot-water dousing. Just in case hot water is not available after a dive, consider packing a heating pad, the squeeze-and-shake kind, to put over the exposed area."

As for treating allergic skin reactions, Shieh recommends a non-sedating antihistamine like Zyrtec or Claritin (loratadine), and a steroid cream such as hydrocortisone. "And of course, I certainly agree that when stings go beyond mild to moderate symptoms, it's time to call a physician -- or invite one on your next dive trip."

The *Baani Adventure's* Lethal Air Compressor

While it is rare these days for divers to be killed by carbon monoxide poisoning, a tragedy on the *Baani Adventure* shows it is a threat, especially in Third World countries. A Russian diver died, two Maldivian diving instructors were hospitalized and eight other divers had to be treated for carbon monoxide poisoning in their tanks provided by the liveaboard. They were floating unconscious after a morning dive at Raydhigaa Thila reef on May 22 but according to another diver on board, the problems had started from the beginning of the trip.

Lee Findlay, a New Zealand divemaster on board as a guest, told *Undercurrent* that he noted several divers and one dive guide had experienced headaches in the two preceding days. The day before the accident, the dive guide had requested a filter change on the two compressors used to fill tanks, but that obviously did nothing.

Ten divers started the fatal dive. After 37 minutes, Findlay's dive buddy rushed to the surface, saying she couldn't breathe. When Findlay surfaced, he found most of the divers and the two guides semi-conscious or unconscious. The single bottle of oxygen on the dhoni didn't work. While a diver did CPR on the unconscious Russian diver, 41-year-old Roman Rudakov, four crew just stood by watching. "None of the crew on either boat appeared to have any training in emergency first aid," Findlay said. "They were completely overwhelmed by the situation." He tried CPR on Rudakov for 35 minutes but got no response. He believes Rudakov was made unconscious by the bad air while he surfaced, and drowned while floating face down in the water.

Tests found most tanks contained carbon monoxide levels of 80 parts per million – the maximum safe level for diving is 15 ppm. Air in Rudakov's tank measured 150 ppm but because that was the maximum level on the testing apparatus, the actual level may have been higher.

Police said a crack in the air pipe leading to the Bauer compressor was poorly mended with duct tape, allowing con-

tamination to enter, probably in the form of engine exhaust. They arrested the 21-year-old man responsible for filling divers' tanks. "But it's the owners who should be held to account rather than this young guy, who no doubt got inadequate training," says Findlay. Other divers told Maldives newspaper *Mini Van News* that they discovered Touring Maldives, *Baani Adventure's* operator, failed to use a carbon monoxide filter recommended by Bauer when compressors are used in conjunction with an engine. When *Undercurrent* contacted Maldives Liveaboards, the *Adventure's* owner, booking operator Gundi Holm replied that the boat's two compressors were serviced by MA Services Male the day before the cruise started, and both compressors were reported to be working fine.

The glaring light on the *Adventure's* lack of first-aid knowledge, plus the fact that the country has no regulatory body for diving safety, made the Maldives tourism bureau organize a dive safety seminar for the local dive operators. It also plans to inspect equipment on all boats.

Maldives Liveaboards says it will start checking boats regularly, and it plans crew training in first-aid courses, compressor handling and emergency management. But Holm says it's difficult to get well-trained crew in Maldives. "Restrictions on foreign work permits don't allow us to bring more educated crew from abroad." Perhaps, but training implemented by dive operators themselves is long overdue.

Holm says divers concerned about doing a trip on that boat or the *Baani Explorer* can cancel their bookings without any fees, and Maldives Liveaboards will refund those who already paid in full.

The Centers for Disease Control lists the most common symptoms of carbon monoxide as headaches, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. High levels of CO inhalation can cause loss of consciousness and death. Unless suspected, CO poisoning can be difficult to diagnose because the symptoms mimic other illnesses.

at 6:15 a.m.; the first of four dives followed at 7:30. Full breakfast at 9 a.m. also included fresh fruit and warm muffins, eggs, maybe a cheese frittata with bacon. After the 11 a.m. dive, I was ready for lunch - - soft fish tacos and coleslaw, sandwiches or pasta or, upon request, Chef Peni made me a crisp, creative salad. Snacks at 4:30 included popcorn, chicken satay, or sashimi. Tea, coffee, hot chocolate, fresh fruit and cookies were on hand all day. The night dive started at dusk about 6 p.m. but was skipped for the village visit, bad weather or if Captain Johnathan needed more time to get to the next site. Most dinners were excellent -- stuffed chicken breast, rack of lamb and grilled tuna with fresh vegetables. The sit-down settings featured cloth napkins and tablecloths. Wine served from carafes added an elegant touch - - the wine snob in me disliked that it came from a box though my dive buddy liked it.

As we visited barrier reefs near Namena, Wakaya and Gau, we dived colorfully named sites. Mellow Yellow was named for its proliferation of yellow and gold soft coral.

Golden Sunset was a first morning dive, and despite sights of a large lionfish, a good-sized white-tipped shark, and a hawkfish and a scorpionfish, I was disappointed that there was no sunlight to bring out the yellow shades of coral. But at Anthias, named for an abundance of them in magenta, orange and red, I had good visibility, mild current and I found a field of garden eels, a pale yellow leaf fish, and an enormous anemone guarded by large clownfish. Dives ranged from 30 to 90 feet, and visibility went from 20 feet on stormy days to 90 feet. Water temperatures averaged 82 degrees, which was actually much warmer than the 76-degree air above.

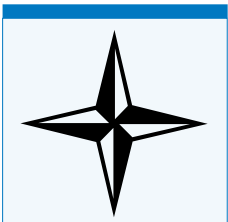
One night, we all donned our sulus for a visit to the 132-person village of Somosomo. After a hearty "bula" greeting, the chief presided over the kava welcome ceremony. The muddy-brown brew made from pulverized root was served from a specially-carved bowl -- one clap of the hands to accept the cup and three claps to register "vinaka," thanks in Fijian. Kava is not intoxicating, but my lips were numb and I felt sleepy but happy. Village women sang and men performed a war dance. Some guests came bearing gifts. I brought first-aid supplies but a few brought gum and candy. Was that a good idea for the kids? And as soon as they were passed out, gum wrappers were scattered on the ground.

Then finally! Vivid color! The sun peeked through when we hit Jim's Alley. At 30 feet, the soft corals blazed red, rust, burgundy, pink and purple. Burnt-orange sea fans waved to me. I saw two large carpets of red anemones (the only site in Fiji where they live, I was told) filled with orange anemone fish. I swam among striped surgeon fish, coral groupers, magenta and yellow dottybacks, iridescent parrotfish and a blue ribbon eel. Lack of sun didn't dent the premier dive site, Nigali Passage. The swift current dive featured schools of barracuda, snappers and big-eyed jacks, dozens of five-foot gray reef sharks and a grouper as big as dual 80s. It hung around on the sandy bottom, posing for photos. A giant clam decked out in purple soft coral sat near a patch of pristine, pale yellow lettuce coral. Banded sea snakes, Moorish idols, yellow needlefish and butterflyfish mingled.

Signs of coral bleaching and weather-caused reef damage are present but Fiji's reefs, walls and pinnacles are alive and regenerating. To experience them in full Technicolor, come between May and October when it's cooler and drier. Although as global warming is changing the reefs, it may also be making the rainy-season time-frames unpredictable.

Nai'a gets high marks for safety, crew-to-passenger ratio, food quality and service. At \$4,200 per person for a ten-day trip, you're certainly going to pay for it, but I'm one of many return guests who come for the frequent-diver discounts and the friendly coddling. I like the divemasters' respect for marine life and a conservation-conscious dedication to preserving it. Nai'a has some minor inconveniences that could be improved, but for divers wanting an upscale trip in the Pacific, it's top-notch.

-- S.M.



Diver's Compass: I arranged my trip, including hotel in Nadi, directly with Nai'a . . . Ten days cost \$4,200 and includes marine park fees and transfers between airport or hotel and the boat; seven-day trips are \$2,940 . . . Nai'a offers a return-diver discount of \$200 for the first return trip, and an additional \$100 discount for each trip thereafter, for a maximum discount of \$1,000 for the 10th return trip . . . Closest chamber is at Suva but the helicopter doesn't fly at night so don't get bent on a night dive. . . . Nitrox is \$7 per day; soft drinks are complimentary as are beer and wine with dinner; hard liquor is \$5 and the excellent trip video is \$95 . . . On-board charges, including tips, are better to be settled in cash because Nai'a annoyingly imposes a 3 percent surcharge on credit cards (which my Nadi hotel didn't do) . . . Air Pacific (a partner of American for mileage purposes) flies from LAX on a daily code-share flight with Air New Zealand and Qantas, and fall fares were recently priced at \$1,150; however, Nai'a's Web site says they can offer

savings on international air fares . . . Nai'a's online newsletter in October 2007 announced that the boat is for sale; one crew member I asked about this didn't seem concerned, believing it's unlikely the Nai'a will leave Fiji . . . Nai'a's Web site: www.naia.com.fj

Bahamas, Canada, Caymans, Indonesia

planning your next dive trip? Here are readers' suggestions

Boynton Beach, Florida. While most divers head to the Florida Keys' reefs in droves, savvy ones prefer the reefs north of Miami, where diving is more adventurous and more interesting. Monty Chandler (Hundersville, NC) went off Boynton Beach with Splashdown Divers in May and calls it a smooth, professional operation. "It's drift diving so you float a dive flag for each group of five to let the boat captain know where you are, and you keep the dive to an hour maximum. Depths were 50 to 60 feet. If you need to surface earlier than the rest of the group, no problem, just follow the line up to the flag. It's mainly experienced divers who knew the boat's routine, not the usual Caribbean 'tourist diver.' The reef was healthy with brilliantly colored sponges, healthy coral formations, schools of diverse fish life and abundant macro life -- from jawfish and slender filefish to cleaner shrimp and tobacco fish. I saw a 300-pound loggerhead turtle taking a snooze and a 12-foot sawfish resting in the sand. What a sight!" (www.splashdowndivers.com)

Best Kept Secret in Yap, Micronesia. Charter subscriber Alan Dean Foster (Sausalito, CA) asks, "Remember the rollicking 1954 Technicolor film *His Majesty O'Keefe* starring Burt Lancaster? The real O'Keefe operated out of Yap, dealing in copra. Located on the main harbor in Colonia, his O'Keefe's Waterfront Inn keeps that same spirit alive." Done in 19th-century Pacific trader style, the Inn has only five rooms, each featuring either a king bed or two twins, private bath, a/c, hair dryer, telephone, writing desk, refrigerator, and coffee service. Opening the paneled artwork above the mantle reveals a hidden flat-screen TV with DVD player. "Every room has a private deck right on (almost in) the water, and includes a private dive locker, the highlight of which is an integrated heated fan for drying your stuff." The Inn also boasts a well-stocked bar, a grassy sitting area by the water, and an Internet cafe in the same building complex. Across the street is the Inn-owned restaurant. "Far more intimate and quieter than the Trader's Ridge and Manta Ray Bay resorts, the Inn is next to Manta Ray Bay Divers. It will make you feel like you've stepped back in time." Rooms run \$155 a night plus 10% tax. (www.okeefesyap.com). PS. Foster is a top-of-the-chart science-fiction writer; visit his website at www.alandeanfoster.com.

Bonaire House Rentals. Many divers traveling in groups rent houses in Bonaire rather than pay more money for

impersonal hotels and condos. Some good Web sites for finding houses: Bonaire Partners (www.bonairepartners.com) and SunRentals (www.sunrentalsbonaire.com), and VacationRentals.com has listings on most Caribbean islands and in Mexico. (www.vacationrentals.com). Subscriber Erik Enger (Washington, DC) recommends Bonaire house renters book dive packages through BelMar Apartments. "By doing so, I could get tanks from both BelMar located down south, or Buddy Dive on the north end of Kralendijk, and this can really save time. If you book through Buddy, you can only get tanks from Buddy. BelMar only has dive boats going out on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so this way I was also able to go on Buddy's boats." (www.belmar-bonaire.com)

Town Pier and South Pier Alert. Book these Bonaire dives in advance, before leaving home: Charlie Wallace (Simpsonville, KY), who stayed at Divi Flamingo Beach Resort, told us, "With more large cruise ships coming in, there is less time and fewer reservations opening up to dive the pier." He couldn't book a dive when he was there in February.

Bikini Atoll Divers Shutdown. Rising fuel prices, the plunging U.S. economy and a screwed-up airline have closed Bikini Atoll Divers after 13 years. Air Marshalls, the one-aircraft airline and the only way to get to the atoll, has been out of commission for seven months due to mechanical difficulties. Jack Niedenthal, tourism operations manager for Bikini Atoll, told *Undercurrent* that even though Air Marshalls may have a second plane by 2009, Bikini Atoll Divers will stay closed because of the skyrocketing cost of fuel to run the power plant on Bikini. "In 2004, it cost us \$350,000 for fuel and operations. For 2009, estimated costs will be \$960,000." Niedenthal welcomes business proposals and suggestions on how Bikini Atoll Divers can be saved – e-mail him at bikini@ntamar.net.

Indigo Divers in Grand Cayman. While our Chapook and Web site lists several good small operations on Grand Cayman, let us also call attention to Indigo Divers, run by Chris and Kate Alpers. Rich Erickson (Marietta, GA), who dived with them in March, says they take you to better sites on the north and south shore, weather permitting, and only take up to six divers on their 35-foot Donzi cruiser. "It's more like diving with friends who have a boat," says Paul Lima (Christiana, TN), who visited in May. "Chris and Kate were attentive but let you dive your computer and were never in a rush to end the dive." Eddie

Allen (Bristol, VA) says, "Because of their diver limits and custom service, I'd recommend Indigo to both experienced divers and infrequent divers like me who need to know the operators are paying attention." (www.indigodivers.com)

Grand Cayman Shore Diving. Subscriber James Heimer (Houston, TX) has decided that rather than paying up to \$200 for a two-tank boat dive with his wife, they'll pay \$25 per tank per dive for both of them. This year, they used Sunset House and Eden Rock, just south of George Town and Sun Divers on the north end of West Bay, which they preferred. "Sun Divers has spruced up the small dive shop and constructed a covered area with benches and a table for gearing up. It's also lit for night diving. The dive shop is located below the Cracked Conch restaurant and alongside the outdoor Macabuca Bar, through which one crosses to the ladder entry into a small inlet leading to the 60-foot mini-wall and Turtle Reef. Left takes you to the tarpon 'cave,' and right takes you along the wall to small coral outcroppings. The main wall is within swimming distance for the more adventurous (and athletically inclined). Aside from the tarpon, we have seen multiple scorpion fish, peacock flounder, white spotted filefish, large grazing schools of midnight parrotfish, turtles, lobster and the usual tropicals. Plenty of space to dry gear after showering down. DiveTech used to operate here, but they are building a resort about a mile away." (Sun Divers' e-mail: sundiver@candw.ky)

Speaking of DiveTech... We have written how DiveTech caters to advanced divers and offers good technical training

courses, but we get occasional comments that it falls short for beginners. William Flanagan (Greenville, SC) says, "Our March trip was my son's first ocean dive since certification, so I signed him up for a refresher course. He had anxiety and buoyancy issues on the first day, so I offered to pay for a private divemaster but DiveTech said no one was available and offered no alternatives. The divemasters on the first two days seemed disdainful of inexperienced divers. My son ended up having a great time, but DiveTech's choices seemed to be either tough it out or dive elsewhere."

Reef Conditions in Utila. When I dived Utila a few years back, I was disappointed in the condition of most reefs, and readers say the deterioration is continuing. Three subscribers who went there in March shared their disappointment. "Lots of macro critters but no fish schools to see," says Vickie Silvia (Old Lyme, CT) who stayed at Laguna Beach. "It was obviously very overfished." "I saw no whale sharks, even though I came during the season," says Richard Sinnott (Boston, MA) who stayed at Utopia Village. "The diving was average at best. The best marine life I saw were a couple of seahorses and turtles."

The reefs are also in trouble, says Laura Austin (Alexandria, VA), another Laguna Beach visitor. "At some sites, I saw up to 80 percent dead coral. I preferred rooting around in the sea beds to hovering over nearly empty reefs." One Utila bar she visited had its toilet directly over the water. "Of course, all the sewage on the island goes directly into the

Three Caribbean Hubs That Leave Your Dive Bags Behind

With all airlines in trouble these days, it's even more important to bring your dive essentials as carry-ons, especially on puddle-jumper flights to Caribbean and Pacific islands. Too often, luggage gets left behind for a day – or five – late. Here are some recent examples of subscribers experiencing lost luggage woes.

Edward Clapp (Corte Madera, CA) says American Airlines overbooked his flight, so he was offered travel vouchers, a seat on the next evening's flight, and expenses for the interim – but no guarantee that his bags would fly with him. "Four of my five bags arrived the day after I did, but the bag with crucial dive gear took two days. I met a family whose luggage had taken five days to catch up with them." . . . After his Islena Air flight from San Pedro Sula to Plantation Beach Resort at Honduras' Bay Islands in January, Don Beukers (San Jose, CA) didn't see his luggage or dive gear for two days.

We often get complaints about Cayman Airways. While all his bags made it with him to Brac Reef Beach Resort last November, Gary Malinowski (Oconomowoc, WI) says his dive gear bag didn't arrive back home until five days later.

"It didn't make the flight off Cayman Brac, even though the resort staff and the airline assured me and other passengers several times that there was plenty of room for our bags." . . . Richard Visser (Grand Rapids, MI) had luggage delays on arrival at Little Cayman Beach Resort in November. "On the way back home, when our plane stopped in Cayman Brac, I looked out the window and was amazed to see my main suitcase being loaded off the plane and left there. I never received an explanation." Leave plenty of time between the Cayman flight and your mainland connection, he says. "I had to fill out lost-luggage claim forms at the Grand Cayman airport, which made my connecting flight with Delta tight. That airport is a zoo on Saturday afternoons as many vacationers are leaving and arriving then."

Even the big airlines mishandle luggage. On his January trip to Nadi, Fiji, Richard Rodriguez' (Arlington, TX) luggage was lost by the baggage handlers at Los Angeles. "It didn't show up for three days, so I had to use rental gear." The more remote your dive destination, the smaller your plane's cargo hold will be, and the more probable that some bags won't make it on the flight. At the very least, bring your computer and prescription-lens mask as carry-ons.

Update on the *Shear Water* Shark Attack Incident

In February, Austrian diver Marcus Groh was killed while photographing sharks during an organized shark feed in the Bahamas. He was aboard Jim Abernethy's *Shear Water*, a popular and well-respected operation frequented by professional photographers. The details of the death have been sketchy until Amy Guthrie reported them in the June 12 edition of the *Broward-Palm Beach New Times*. Here is a synopsis.

Marcus Groh, a 49-year-old lawyer from Vienna, and two other Austrian divers settled 80 feet below the surface and positioned themselves around a plastic crate filled with fish bits. Smelling dinner, a gang of stockily-built bull sharks arrived. Shortly after 9 a.m., divemaster Grey O'Hara descended with a fresh crate of bait. He saw the Austrians lying supine on the sandy bottom, 20 feet apart, snapping pictures of the sharks weaving among them. O'Hara lashed the crate to a weight at the end of a rope dangling from the surface. The crate settled onto the ocean floor, just 10 feet from Groh. Suddenly a seven-foot-long bull shark bumped the chum box with its snout, nudging it perilously close to Groh.

O'Hara, anticipating trouble, rushed toward his client. A mere two feet separated bait from human. In an instant, a sand cloud obscured the horror of a shark sinking its teeth into Groh's left calf muscle, slashing through arteries and veins. Groh rolled on his back in an effort to shake the shark. O'Hara grabbed his customer's tank and kicked the shark several times. The shark released Groh and swam away placidly.

O'Hara rushed Groh to the surface. Once onboard the *Shear Water*, Groh passed out. He was bleeding profusely. The crew and passengers swaddled him in blankets and raised the

shredded leg above his heart. They poured a coagulant powder into the gaping eight-inch wound to stanch the bleeding. Boat captain Jim Abernethy radioed the U.S. Coast Guard for help; the *Shear Water* was anchored 65 miles east of the trauma centers in South Florida. At one point, Groh's heart stopped. The crew administered CPR. The Coast Guard chopper arrived at 10:20 a.m., 50 minutes after receiving the distress call. O'Hara accompanied a still-unconscious Groh to Jackson Memorial Hospital, where the diver was pronounced dead at 11:33 a.m. Groh had bled to death.

Abernethy's dive shop continues to operate day trips off Palm Beach, but callers are informed that, in light of the Groh incident, the *Shear Water* won't be transporting passengers to shark haunts. However, on the Web site Wetpixel.com, underwater photographer Eric Cheng has posted an announcement of an Abernethy-led "expedition" that departs July 19 from Palm Beach County. The eight-night voyage costs \$3,870 and is open to only eight divers. "We screen our passengers and accept advanced divers with shark-diving experience only," Cheng warns. "I hate to have to say this, but please do not book if you are squeamish about using bait to attract sharks. We will absolutely be baiting sharks and do not want to fight with you about the issue."

In our April 2008 article on Groh's death, we reported that the Bahamas Diving Association was trying to ban openwater, non-cage dives in Bahamian waters. Stuart Cove, of Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas and vice-president of the Association, told *Undercurrent* in June that the government hasn't made any changes to shark dives to date.

water, so why be surprised? Fishermen have to feed their families, and the Honduran government may not have the money to spend on treatment plants, but because there's no marine protection, Utila diving is on a downward spiral."

Archipelago Adventurer II in the Banda Sea. This new 130-foot wood sailboat raises the standards for Indonesian liveboards, says Scott Kraemer (Los Angeles, CA), who went aboard in January. "Though there were only four divers, we were given great service by the full 20-person crew. They offered first and second breakfasts, inside and outside dining depending on the weather, and buffet as well as waiter service. Food was restaurant-quality in preparation and presentation." Crew rinsed wetsuits after every dive. Nitrox was no extra charge. Afternoon surface intervals were onshore – visits to a pearl farm and a local working village, and a hike to the top of a jungle island hilltop for a beautiful view. The drawback: only four dives daily, including night dives. "But sea life in the rarely-visited waters of Banda's Maluku province is in pristine shape, no coral bleaching and plenty of fish, big and small, making each dive a gem." (www.archipelago-fleet.com)

Peter Hughes' Paradise Dancer. It launched in Sulawesi in May, but we got mixed reviews from readers who went on the first few sailings. Peter Swan (Paradise Valley, AZ), aboard for its second sailing, says the boat is underhyped. "It's a motor yacht with sails resembling the fast American schooners that traded across the Pacific. Cabins are 50 percent larger than Hughes' other liveboards, with bathrooms you want to spend time in. The boat was so silent that night cruises between dive locations lulled me instantly to sleep. Four dives a day were at either new or only lightly dived sites, many next to active volcano islands. One trip was a morning snorkel inside volcano-heated water, like a hot tub in the ocean." But John Singer (Berkeley, CA) says his cabin leaked from above deck, and food and sanitation were terrible. "Most dinners featured overdone, tasteless meats. Several people became ill with abdominal pain, vomiting, the runs and fever. The captain and many crew were smokers and used the ocean as an ashtray." Most disappointing was the diving. "It was below average – sites with lots of trash, poor corals and a lacking fish population. If you're looking for pris-

tine diving, this is not the itinerary, and I believe this area was misrepresented to me.” (www.peterhughes.com)

Turks and Caicos Hotel Bargain. Provo’s Grace Bay hotel prices are through the roof, but there is real value at the Sibonne Beach Hotel, an “intimate” boutique hotel described by reader Larry Sensenig (Sioux City, IA) as “adequate, but not fancy.” Room amenities included cable TV, mini-fridge, hairdryer, air conditioning, coffeemaker, direct-dial telephone and an in-room safe. “The inner courtyard was a garden of mature plants and trees, and there’s a small pool. The Sibonne is right on Grace Bay Beach, which was one of the best beaches I’ve ever been on.” You can arrange a pickup here by most dive operators. (www.sibonne.com)

Cold Water Diving in Canada. Try 46 degrees and currents but abundant marine life, says Susan Simpson

(Snohomish, WA) who went in April with Abyssal Dive Charters, based on British Columbia’s Quadra Island. “Earl the operator was good at judging currents so we could dive 50- to 80-foot depths with minimum effort. There are soft corals, nudibranchs, anemones, ling cod, various sculpins, all the usual characters in unusual quantities. In one crevice, I found five Puget Sound king crabs, the biggest almost a foot across.” Lodgings, two private rooms for couples and two barrack-style rooms, are in the lower floor of Earl’s home. “It’s comfortable, with a huge TV, cozy wood stove, and their hot tub feels really good after a hard day’s diving. You actually eat in their dining room but Earl and family are so gracious that you soon feel like you’re staying with friends.” (www.abysal.com)

- Ben Davison

Nineteen Hours Adrift in Australia

Undercurrent *interviews the rescued couple*

After a dive in Gary’s Lagoon in the Whitsunday Islands on May 23, the dive boat *Pacific Star* discovered a couple were missing and couldn’t find them. But the two divers, American Allyson Dalton and Briton Richard Neely, were found in good shape after spending 19 hours stranded off the Great Barrier Reef. Then the blame game followed. The divers and the dive boat are playing the “he said, she said” game, while a potential lawsuit dangles. The press speculated how the couple made a speedy recovery so they could cash in on their story. Debates started about who should pay the rescue costs.

The aftermath is similar to what happened after the disappearance of Tom and Eileen Lonergan, American divers left behind on a Great Barrier Reef diving trip 10 years ago, whose story was made into the film *Open Water*. Their dive boat returned to shore without them and it was two days before the alarm was raised. No sign of the couple was ever found, and they are believed to have drowned or been killed by sharks. The Aussie scuba industry went on the offensive and blamed the divers, saying it was staged. (Read our coverage of the Lonergan mystery in our March 1998 issue online.)

So what really happened once Neely and Dalton entered the waters at Gary’s Lagoon? Did they break any rules? Was the dive briefing detailed enough? How long did the boat wait to sound the alarm? Dalton and Neely told their story to us, and there are lessons to be learned here so that you can be spared the scenario these two had. (We asked OzSail, owners of the *Pacific Star* to do the same, but never received a reply so we’re going with the statements they gave to newspapers.)

“The Boat Was Laid Back, to Say The Least”

Dalton, a bar owner from Sacramento, and her boyfriend Neely, a dive instructor based in Phuket, Thailand, went to Australia in May to dive the Great Barrier Reef for the first time. Both were experienced - - Dalton received her PADI divemaster certification in March, and Neely is a PADI Master Scuba Diver. They chose *Pacific Star*, a 65-foot catamaran known as a budget boat for backpackers and novice divers. “It was the only all-purpose dive boat that fit what we wanted to do,” says Dalton. “A short liveaboard trip that sailed the Whitsundays and went out to the Reef.”

She said the boat crew seemed “laid back” and not thorough about dive instructions, even though only eight of the 20 passengers were certified divers and six others were going through certification. The PADI waiver form everyone signed was for course certification instead of the standard scuba diving release. The cruise director was excited that Neely and Dalton were experienced divers. “He even pulled us aside to say how happy he was that he didn’t have to babysit.”

Because of their experience, the cruise director and skipper told them about special places to dive, different sites than where other divers were taken, and a laid-back dive. “It was about ‘this is where you should go, you may see a shark cleaning station at 40 meters.’ There was no standard discussion of currents, dropoff, maximum depth and time, or pickup spot.”

Dalton said the boat was also lax on safety gear. “They didn’t have any batteries for flashlights, and we were never offered signaling devices. Luckily, we had our own. We had two dive computers but no one else did, nor were they offered any.”

Poseidon Clips Its Wings In Dive Gear Recall

Swedish dive gear manufacturer Poseidon recalled a batch of its W50 wings last month, the reason being manufacturer error in the inner bladder. The seam holding the two bladder halves together can easily break, deflating the BCD. Mike Ange, manager of Florida-based Waterproof Gear, which distributes Poseidon products in the U.S., told *Undercurrent* the problem was found by Poseidon staff, and no divers have reported problems or accidents while using the wing. "There were only a couple in this specific batch that had problems, but we're pulling the entire lot to be on the safe side."

Ange said only 50 of the products were shipped to the U.S., and 30 percent of those are still unsold, leaving 35 to be recalled. The faulty bladders are marked with batch number 5445 and were sold between September 2007 and June 10, 2008. Poseidon W50 wing users can check the batch number by opening the zipper between the two "legs" of the wing to reveal the inner bladder. Between the bladder's two legs is a tab with article number, batch number and manufacturing year. If you see a '5445,' take it back to your dive shop, and Poseidon will provide a free replacement.

Was It Okay to Leave the Lagoon?

On May 23, the third day aboard, the boat director gave Neely and Dalton a briefing about Gary's Lagoon. Here's where the differing points of view start. The couple says they got another not-so-thorough briefing, and the cruise director had privately told them of a passageway to the outside of the lagoon. OzSail said Neely and Dalton were told not to leave the lagoon but did so knowingly.

Rebecca Sharkey, another diver onboard, told British newspaper *The Independent* that her group got a thorough briefing but Neely and Dalton were at the back of the boat, discussing how to find manta rays. "The strict instruction was to stay inside the lagoon, don't go outside it," said Sharkey, who got stuck in the current but was rescued by the dinghy. "The lagoon floor is 40 feet, so if you've gone below that, you've gone outside the lagoon. If you feel the current, you've gone outside. Come straight back but if you can't, surface straight away and there's people on deck ready to come get you. He said it was a safe dive spot, just don't go outside it."

Dalton and Neely wanted to fit in two more dives, so they told the skipper they would be down for an hour, surfacing at 3 p.m., and go out for a final half-hour dive at 4:30 p.m. "The skipper told us, 'Don't worry, I'll come to wherever you are.'"

The dive was normal, only a slight current and a modest drift. They found the lagoon passageway but it was a dead end, and went out another way. The couple wasn't alarmed because they saw two other divers, a British father and son, outside the reef, about to resurface. Their dive computers – Dalton had a Suunto D9 and Neely a Suunto Stinger – showed nothing unusual. They surfaced six minutes after the father and son, and Neely released his five-foot safety sausage.

On the surface, they noticed the boat was farther away than they expected, about 650 feet. "We saw the dinghy at the boat, saw the two divers get off, then the dinghy driver got off and did not come back. We weren't concerned because our safety sausage was up, but the current was picking up and we were getting carried away." They kept watching the boat until 4:15, 90 minutes after surfacing. Then they saw the dinghy move, going out of the lagoon and coming along the reef toward where the couple had surfaced. "We were blowing whistles but the wind was blowing in our direction and we were drifting toward the setting sun. We saw the boat go around, then turn back. We couldn't believe that they didn't come look for us for 90 minutes. Then we realized, 'they don't see us and they're not coming to get us.'"

Fraser Yule, manager of OzSail, told Australian newspaper *The Courier-Mail* that the crew did everything possible to locate Neely and Dalton, asking why four lookouts with high-powered binoculars on the deck couldn't spot them. An anonymous crew member told another paper: "There was a mile of shallow reef, why not stand on it and wave for help? There was a marker buoy standing 20 feet out of the water, why not hold onto it and wait to be picked up?" Neely's reply: "The current was too strong and there was no point in using up all our energy."

Their fellow divers told the press that they searched for three hours but when it became too dark to continue looking, their boat headed back to shore.

After nightfall, Neely used rope from his marker buoy to tie the two together. They huddled every half hour, pressing stomachs together for warmth through their wetsuits, then they would flip their bodies over to swim in the direction of the dive boat, as Neely was monitoring their position by compass. The first helicopter came by at 9:30 p.m. and didn't see them, but Neely assumed they would come back. They did, every 45 minutes, but the wind and six-foot waves hindered a sighting, and finally they stopped at 3 a.m. "Both of us had lost it," Neely told British newspaper *The Guardian*. "We were hallucinating, seeing everything from robots to colourful fish in the sky and speaking a bit of gibberish."

The helicopters started again at daylight and then at 8:40 a.m., the divers were spotted. It took a couple of tries to get them – a venomous sea snake reared up in Dalton's face on the first try. The couple was flown to a Townsville hospital and was released after only a few hours.

“The Press Was Merciless”

That’s when the rumors started. The British and Australian press printed that the couple had worn extra-thick wetsuits and carried water bottles on their dive, as if preparing to stay out all night. Ridiculous, says Dalton. “My BCD has very small pockets so there’s no way I could fit a bottle in there. And the water temperature was 74 degrees, so it’s certainly not tropical. As for my wetsuit, I was going to use it for my next dive in the colder waters of Komodo – exactly where those five divers disappeared.” (See the sidebar below on that story.) “Everyone else was issued stinger suits by the boat but if they had the option of thicker suits, they would have taken it.”

When the couple was interviewed by the *Guardian* while still in hospital beds, rumors abounded about million-dollar book deals and paid appearances on *60 Minutes*. The flames were fanned when the couple hired a celebrity agent to go through the offers.

Dalton admits they got paid \$10,000 for the 10-minute interview, but that was the first and last time they got paid. “If we wanted to sell our story, we wouldn’t take the first offer because then we lost exclusivity. The celebrity agent called my friend and we jumped at the chance for someone to field the calls because we were inundated with offers.” Back in the U.S., they appeared on NBC’s *Dateline* and *Today* shows but weren’t paid. “We just wanted the correct story to appear in our home countries, because the Australian press was merciless.”

Rescue efforts are estimated to be \$400,000, and the press trumpeted that Australian taxpayers will foot the bill. Dalton

says she hasn’t received a bill, that she and Neely were insured by Divers Alert Network for \$100,000 each, and that DAN assured her the rescue and medical costs will be taken care of. She says she and Neely will make a donation to the rescuers’ organization, but if anyone should reimburse costs, it should be OzSail. “They were negligent, their duty of care was not met. If they had alerted Emergency Services earlier, we would have been rescued well before dark.”

OzSail’s official statement is this: “Allyson and Richard did not remain on the dive site. They did not follow the clear instructions of the dive instructor. They did not surface immediately upon leaving Gary’s Lagoon. Visibility for a safety sausage is approximately one nautical mile.” It also said emergency services were alerted within one hour of their scheduled surface time, refuting reports of a three-hour delay.

While the police aren’t filing charges, Australia’s Workplace Health and Safety division is investigating potential breaches of workplace laws. Dalton says the investigation is showing “things were worse than we even realized,” but she wouldn’t give specifics. She and Neely are contemplating legal action against OzSail.

Her advice to avoid being stranded: Pay the extra airline fees to haul your safety gear. She and Neely had decided to scrimp. “We had a larger than normal safety sausage and whistles but it was not normally all we would carry. Going forward, I’ll use every single safety device I can find.” She’ll also make sure more people on board know her dive profile. “If we had to do it again, we’d have

First It’s Sharks to Fend Off, Then It’s Lethal Lizards

Five divers swept away by strong currents in Indonesia’s Komodo National Park survived 12 hours in the water before scrambling onto a remote island where they faced an equally big threat: the Komodo dragon. After landing on the island of Rinca, the divers – three from Britain and one each from France and Sweden – came face-to-face with the giant lizard. They fought it off by pelting it with rocks and pieces of wood.

Komodo dragons can grow up to 10 feet long. They have sharp, serrated teeth and come out when they smell something new, including humans – whom they’ve been known to attack (Sharon Stone’s ex-husband got his big toe severely bitten by one during his private tour at the Los Angeles Zoo) and kill.

On Thursday morning, June 5, the divers, part of a group dive with Reefseekers Dive Centre on Flores Island, left Labuanbajo Harbor on a wooden boat. They jumped in near Tawa Besar, immediately encountered rough currents and drifted 20 miles from the dive site. The group struggled

against the rip for several hours but eventually stopped swimming and tied themselves together by their BCDs to preserve energy. Late on Thursday night, they saw Rinca. “If we’d continued to drift, it would have been the ocean,” French diver Laurent Pinel, 31, told London newspaper *The Times*. “But we were exhausted. Everyone had cramps.”

Once on the island, they scraped mussels from the rocks for food and had to fend off the persistent dragon for 36 hours. On Saturday, one of the 30 boats searching the waters spotted them waving frantically on shore and took them to Flores Island for minor treatment. “We’re safe, but absolutely exhausted and dehydrated,” said 25-year-old British diver Charlotte Allin.

Komodo’s unpredictable currents can be as scary as its dragons. It’s in a place where the Indian and Pacific Oceans meet, and while that makes for incredible marine diversity, it also creates “washing machine” currents that converge and separate. Whirlpools and eddies can pull people downwards, so it’s a place only for experienced divers.

everyone witness on the boat what we discussed with the dive leader. If everyone on the boat hears what you do, you're more likely to be missed after a dive."

We'll add one thing: Don't accept laid-back dive briefings. Make sure they're clear - - a good dive guide will make

you repeat it back to ensure you got it. If you didn't get it, ask detailed questions. Even if you're told it's a shallow dive site, better to be safe than stranded.

- -*Vanessa Richardson*

The Last Word on Dive Tipping

rules for American divers maybe even I can observe

When it comes to tipping on a dive trip, you can tip anyone you want any amount you want. It's your business. But if you have some regard for money, the purpose of the tip, the country and its culture you're visiting, as well as your fellow divers who come from other countries, you might try to be thoughtful rather than reckless. Of course, hardly anyone at a dive resort or on a liveaboard will turn down a tip, but it's not necessarily appropriate to pass out money as you would business cards at a convention.

After reading the hundreds of responses we received from our readers to our e-mail question about tipping, it's clear that most divers don't know what is "right." Most Americans feel guilty if they don't tip big, while just about everyone else in the world tips more selectively, tips less, and often never. Not because they're cheap, but because they believe people should properly perform the job they are being paid for and that it's not up to the customer to reward them a second time. They often view American tip-pers as foolish and crass.

So if you're an American diver and want some guidelines, other than what travel agents and resort and liveaboard owners urge us to do (15 percent, maybe 20 percent, of the total bill, which means hundreds of dollars that may never end up where you intend), you should pick those who did something for you tip them individually. If you jump into the tipping pool, you have no control over the results.

Ben's American Rules

I believe tips are for the so-called working stiff - - minimum-wage earners, people not earning a living wage, people in dead-end jobs, and people who are neither managers, professionals nor owners, and who don't get a share of the profit.

Tips are for:

- * People who serve you, like waiters and bartenders, but not your butcher or the lady selling you jewelry.
- * People who clean up after you, like cabin attendants and maids, but not your dry cleaner or dental hygienist.
- * People who deliver things to you, like bellhops and pizza drivers, but not the FedEx guy or the furniture delivery man.
- * People who transport you, like a dinghy driver or a cab

driver, but not an Amtrak engineer or a liveaboard captain.

* People who point you in the right direction or help you out, like guides who point out fish or a concierge who scores you World Series tickets, but not your librarian or travel agent.

* People who touch you, like masseuses and barbers, but not nurses or your tailor.

* People who save your life, like the boatman who tracked you down a mile from your liveaboard, but not the dive guide who forgot to count you.

* And you might consider tips for the folks who work when you sleep, like those raking the leaves on the beach, scrubbing the kitchen floors, or washing the urine out of your wetsuit.

Of course, most Aussies and Brits I know are scoffing at my laundry list, but remember guys, these are American rules.

Because tips are not for owners, managers or professionals, it means that it's not for chefs, trip leaders, scuba instructors who teach you (did you tip your underpaid high school gym teacher?), airplane pilots or bus drivers. Nor are they for people who grab your suitcase without asking, or guides who don't point out fish, say rude things to you, talk behind the back of others, are sexist, racist and just plain stupid . . . and, of course, for anyone who suggests a tip, no matter how subtly. A tip is not an entitlement.

If you boil all this down, the American traveling diver should consider tipping dive guides, tank attendants, chase boat drivers, and servers and cleaners. A tip pot or tipping request that includes the photo pro, the chef, the engineer, the tour director or the boat captain, to name a few, is excessive and ought to be ignored in favor of individual tips.

The rule works very well on a liveaboard, where you've got plenty of time to tip people individually. It's a little tricky, however, because the chef might also be the one who makes your bed, so he might deserve a small tip for that, but not if he fails to wash his hands afterward.

At a resort, where for each day you have a different guide, dinghy captain and guy washing out your wetsuit, it gets tough, especially if you haven't learned their names. But at many venues, giving a ten spot to the guide and asking him to spread it around is like asking a tot to share her Christmas candy - only

after she gets her fill. You might feel less guilty, but you may just be empowering a bag man.

When in Rome...or Raja Ampat

No matter where you go, most everyone you tip will be a local (though some guides might be American or Aussie). If you follow my approach, you should then fashion a tip based on local standards, which may not be easy to figure out, but give it a shot.

For example, with a quick Google search I learned the average wage in Bangkok is less than US\$30 a day, but that's weighted by high-income earners. When you go lower down the income levels, it's more like \$10-\$15 for office workers and even less for laborers. Minimum wage is around \$6 per day.

In Indonesia, where the minimum wage is \$3 a day, local crew excluding dive guides generally make \$50 to \$150 a month. Local dive guides range between \$100 to \$700 a month. Expat dive guides/cruise directors, usually around \$800 to \$1,500 a month, some more. In Papua New Guinea, laborers may make \$100 to \$200 a month and dive guides more.

So in countries like this, I think a tip of \$5 a day would be fitting, even generous. If the person was serving 12 divers on a liveaboard, he'd be getting twice his wage in tips (he can be paid less and still be paid fairly if he is fed). If he were my private guide, I'd give him \$10, maybe \$15. If someone in a hotel carries your bag, a five-spot is not the appropriate tip; two-bits is closer to it.

If there are five people on the liveaboard who meet my tipping criteria, then I should be shelling out \$250 for a ten-day trip. Divers who think 15 percent of a \$3000 trip would be shelling out \$450.

The Caribbean, of course has a higher standard of living and pay scale. In the Cayman Islands, depending on what island and what resort, monthly wages range from as low as US\$1,000 to nearly \$2,000. Tipping \$10 to \$15 per day total for those involved – you pick 'em – seems fair. If you're tipping everyone all at once on a \$1,500 bill for the week, then \$150 to \$200 would make sense – if you're an American. If you're Canadian or a Brit? Well, at least buy your dive guide a pint or two.

Do You Know Where Your Money Is Going?

Of course, the operators, who rely on tips to ensure their staff is paid enough to stay on the job, won't be happy with what they will see as a parsimonious approach from Americans with deep pockets – after all, we Americans are subsidizing all those other divers who don't tip. But let us remind them of cruise ships. These days, tipping is becoming standardized. It's \$10 a day per person for everyone but the bartender, who is tipped separately. And you, with the deep pockets, should keep in mind that if you're traveling with Europeans, Aussies and Kiwis, you might be the only one tipping. And they'll consider you daft.

Reader Tip: “Pad” Your Camera Gear

Subscriber Foster Bam (Greenwich, CT) offers up an odd way of protecting his SLR camera in its housing from leaks, but he swears it works.

“Since most housings suspend the camera in the middle of the space on a platform mount, any absorbent material in the housing bottom will capture the water before it reaches the camera. When I first saw this done, it was a fellow diver who stuffed an old sock in his housing. However, I've found that a feminine hygiene pad is more compact and far more absorbent.”

Regardless of what leaders tell you about the fairness of their community pots, you have no control over how it's disbursed so you can't be sure of the distribution formula. While the money often gets to the hardworking soul who just cleans cabins or tends to the engine, it may not. So carry a dozen plain envelopes, lots of small bills, and pass them out to the people whom you want the tips to reach.

And tip for the service you received, not so you'll be remembered when you return. That may make sense if you go to the same bar or restaurant every Friday night, but if you're going back to Captain Don's or Beqa Lagoon Resort once a year, chances are most everyone you dealt with has moved on, and if not, you'd be remembered only if you dropped a hundred-dollar bill everywhere you went. Sure, you “felt like family,” but a hundred people a week leave feeling like family.

Finally, of course, you can tip anyone any amount you care to. It's your money and you can give it away. However, there's something gauche about an American tossing money around, and while you might put a moment of joy in the hands of the recipient, a little prudence will benefit the greater good. And if you still feel like a cheapskate, give it to a school or library. At the airport, drop it into one of those buckets for a local charity. Instead of tipping the photo pro or the tour director who makes living wages, you can feed five families for a week.

I asked several people to read and comment on this before it went to print. Here are two views I want to share.

John Bantin, Technical Editor of *Diver* in the UK, says this: “Yours is an interesting yet uniquely American perspective on tipping. I believe it is best to do what is considered normal in any situation. In America, people who serve seem to live on the tips they get but in the EU, people must be paid a proper wage. In some countries like Papua New Guinea, not only is tipping not normal but it is actively discouraged. In Thailand, everyone hustles for more. When you tip a live-aboard boat crew, often it is the people you never see who deserve the most, such as the engineer who stayed up all night to mend the compressor or fix the sanitation flush, so

individual tipping is often unfair. And giving 10 percent of the cost of your holiday is a ludicrous idea that makes other people think Americans have got more money than sense.”

Ken Knezick, American owner of Island Dreams Travel in Austin, had this comment: “Personally, if I ‘overtip’ and it helps to change someone’s life, then I am happy to be able to do so. I don’t think we are required to perpetuate disparities

of income and lifestyle. I have been graced with much good fortune, be it due to luck of birthplace, education, opportunity, and a body and brain that work. Sharing that wealth is part of what makes me who I am. On the other hand, I have had a resort manager tell me, ‘Don’t spoil the wogs.’ What a pitiful attitude.”

-- Ben Davison

The Fastest Fins for Divers

achieve the same speed for either \$786 or \$160 a pair

There are so many fins available now that one can get deceived into thinking one type is much like another. It’s only when you get them side by side that you can see the differences. But how do you know which is more effective? Pete McCarthy, the man who patented the Nature’s Wing split fin design, kindly made me some underwater speedometers with the intention of proving his fins were best.

I wanted to measure fins’ efficiency in moving a diver forward. If you can get a speed of two knots in still water, you’ll accomplish a speed of three knots with a one-knot current behind you. Conversely, if you head into a one-knot current, you’ll only achieve that speed. So I assert that these speedometers I used, in controlled circumstances in still water of a fixed depth, gave a good indication of any fin’s efficiency when compared with another.

The most efficient kick is contained within the radius of the body’s slipstream as it moves forward. A wider, scissor kick is actually less efficient, and most apparent when heading into a current. I grouped the fins by the average results achieved.

The blades are either split (propeller fins), flat, or of the channelled water-scooping variety. I’ve never seen the advantage of vents but some manufacturers use them. Some say split fins are no good in a current. Some manufacturers used the split-fin concept to take the effort out of finning instead of increasing efficiency, but there is no such thing as a free lunch -- these soft and floppy versions of split fins proved useless in an oncoming current.

I concentrated on open-heel fins because they’re more popular with those who prefer to wear neoprene boots when diving. All fins compared here are one size up from regular or medium.

The foot pocket is important; I like fins to have ones that encompass my foot up to the heel so that less strain is put on the ankles and shin muscles during the downward power kick. The more support under the heel, the less tiring the fin will be during long periods of heavy finning.

Recorded average speeds ranged between 2 m.p.h. and 3

m.p.h., but it was soon apparent which fins were consistently faster. Fins in Group A were the most efficient but were unusual in that they needed getting used to in order to get the best out of them. Group B were otherwise excellent performers. Group C were not as good, and I reserved a special place for one pair of fins in Group D.

Prices are list price, and all fins have similar straps and buckles except Mares fins (its Advanced Buckle System allows divers to cantilever them tightly onto the feet rather than physically pull straps tighter), and the Force Fin (elastic bungee).

I often hear divers talk about maneuverability. Obviously, longer fins are more difficult to use in confined spaces than short ones but regardless of whether you frog or flutter kick, it’s just a matter of getting used to the fins you have. If a fin is not comfortable, you’ll never be happy with them. Now this is not a perfectly scientific test, but the results are a starting point in your quest for the perfect open-heel fin.

Group A: The Most Efficient

Excellerating Force Fin (average 2.8 m.p.h.) Unconventional and compact. The price says it all. You’ll either love them or hate them. (\$786; www.forcefin.com)

Mares Raptor (average 2.8 m.p.h.). Mares always said it wouldn’t make split fins but it has, and good ones, too. But it’s a pity the foot pocket is a little short, putting unnecessary strain on shin muscles. (\$160; www.mares.com)

Apollo Biofin Pro XT (average 2.7 m.p.h.) This version of the heavyweight (6.6 pounds) is an all-rubber Biofin. The foot pocket of each fin is short for those with long feet but the speedometer results are undeniable. (\$200; www.apollosportsusa.com)

Scubapro Twin Jet Max (average 2.7 m.p.h.) This split fin defies the idea that they’re no good in an oncoming current. They have one of the most generously-sized foot pockets in length. (\$220; www.scubapro.com)

Cressi Sub Reaction (average 2.6 m.p.h.) These are fins for those with the muscle power to use them. The long foot pocket

ensures that the fin becomes an integral part of the leg. (\$98; www.cressi.it)

Mares Avanti Quattro (average 2.6 m.p.h.) These are the fins by which others are judged – and they are still excellent. (\$119; www.mares.com)

Mares Avanti Superchannel (average 2.6 m.p.h.) It's a pity that Mares has chosen to make the foot pocket even shorter, resulting in more strain on the shin muscles than before. (\$100; www.mares.com)

Group B: Still Excellent

Cressi Sub Rondine A (average 2.5 m.p.h.) You need to be fit in the heart and legs department to get the real advantage from them. A long foot pocket ensures you'll make the most of your muscle power. (\$90; www.cressi.it)

TUSA Xpert Zoom SF-8 (average 2.5 m.p.h.) I would have preferred a longer foot pocket to allow for a stronger kick, but these still performed with the best. (\$175; www.tusadive.com)

IST Talaria (average 2.5 m.p.h.) The foot pocket on this split fin is big enough to accommodate the widest drysuit boot. (\$140; www.istsports.com)

Oceanic Vortex V-16 (average 2.5 m.p.h.) The foot pocket on this small fin looked generous until I tried to get my standard boot into it. (\$190; www.oceanicworldwide.com)

Oceanic Vortex V-8 (average 2.4 m.p.h.) This fin has a more accommodating, if narrower, foot pocket than the V-16, but it proved hard to pull the boot out after in-water use, and very difficult to get drysuit boots into. (\$120; www.oceanicworldwide.com)

Group C: Fair to Middling

Oceanic Viper (average 2.2 m.p.h.) At 3.5 pounds, its light weight appeals to travelers, and it also reflected in my tests to accelerate with it quickly. The otherwise generous foot pocket needs more space in the toe end. (\$90; www.oceanicworldwide.com)

Sherwood Kinesis EX (average 2.2 m.p.h.) At 4.4 pounds, it's one of the most lightweight fins tested. (\$140; www.sherwoodscuba.com)

Aqua Lung Blades II Flex (average 2.1 m.p.h.) A unique clip on the strap undoes easily and makes stepping out of the fin simple, although it tended to come unfastened during testing. (\$120; www.aqualung.com)

Aqua Lung Caravelle (average 2.1 m.p.h.) The inside of the foot-pocket is entirely smooth, making the fin suck on to the boot and difficult to pull off. (\$90; www.aqualung.com)

IST Bora Bora (average 2.1 m.p.h.) Split fins, without the split. Too shallow at the toe end to get a boot properly inserted all the way. (\$58; www.istsports.com)

TUSA Tri-Ex SF-6 (average 2 m.p.h.) It's more suited to a dainty foot to fit the foot pocket's narrowness. (\$99; www.tusadive.com)

Group D: The Bottom Finner

TUSA Reef Tourer (average 1.7 m.p.h.) Tiny fins in a very soft rubber have foot pockets equally suitable for unclad feet as for boots. That said, I found them much better than no fins at all. (\$20; www.tusadive.com)

John Bantin is the technical editor of DIVER magazine in the United Kingdom. For 20 years, he has used and reviewed virtually every piece of equipment available in the UK (and the U.S.) and makes about 300 dives a year for that purpose. and a professional underwater photographer.

Diver Charged with Killing Wife on Honeymoon

After months of investigation, Australian police charged American Gabe Watson on June 20 with murder. He allegedly drowned wife Tina, 26, on a honeymoon dive trip aboard Mike Ball's *Spoilsport* in 2003 after only 11 days of marriage. The coroner ruled there were suspicious circumstances, and rejected a claim by Watson's attorney that he was denied the presumption of innocence due to media attention (Australian press covered the inquest and NBC's *Dateline* ran a story this spring).

Watson didn't go to Australia for the inquest. He was videotaped during police interviews, claiming Tina, a novice diver, had panicked during a dive to the *Yongala* wreck near Townsville. He said she thrashed around in the water, grabbed hold of his mask and pushed it off his face. Despite his dive experience, Watson said he decided to go for help rather than follow his bride downwards and attempt a rescue.

Police initially believed it was an accident but became suspicious when Watson kept changing details of his story. They found no pre-existing medical conditions nor anything wrong with Tina's dive gear. After reenacting the dive, police believe Watson restrained Tina, turned off her air supply until she was dead or close to it, then turned it back on and let her sink to the seabed.

Evidence showed Watson made some moves for financial gain before and after the fatal trip. Tina's father said that shortly before the wedding Watson had asked Tina to increase her life insurance and make him sole beneficiary (she didn't). Watson had tried to sue his travel insurer five days after his wife's death but discontinued legal proceedings in May. In January, the inquest attendees saw undercover video footage of him using bolt-cutters to remove flowers secured to his wife's grave in Alabama.

Queensland police are preparing a warrant for Watson, the first step in what's expected to be a long, drawn-out extradition battle.

Flotsam & Jetsam

Jazz Star Dies in Dive Accident.

Swedish jazz pianist and composer Esbjörn Svensson, who won awards and acclaim in Europe and the U.S., died during a dive trip in Sweden's Stockholm archipelago on June 16. Early reports at press time state that Svensson, 44, was diving near a jetty with other divers when he hit his head and lost consciousness. His body was found on the seabed, and CPR efforts were unsuccessful.

Spirit Airlines Alert, When you're flying low-cost airlines, reconfirm your flight. Reader Jill Bruder purchased tickets to Turks and Caicos in July, departing from Detroit to Ft. Lauderdale and finally to Provo. She called before departure and learned that Spirit had rearranged her family's flights to an earlier one to Atlantic City, where they would spend the night before reaching Provo. Because Spirit didn't notify her, Bruder's family would have arrived at the airport to find their flight had departed. "Cheaper flights have consequences. I rebooked on Delta and saved a family dive trip with some quick thinking and a Visa card."

Old Broads Dive Club. For female divers, subscriber Mae Lon Ding (Anaheim, CA) wrote us about the Old Broads Dive

Club that plans trips worldwide year round (gentleman guests are allowed). "The trips are well-priced and it's a great way to meet other women divers," says Ding. "I have been on several trips and they were all well-planned, lots of fun, and a good value." Membership fees are \$10. Upcoming trips are scheduled for La Paz, Baja California in October and Cozumel in February. Details are on the Old Broads' Web site: www.obdc.org

What Do Reefs Mean to You? That's the name of Reef Check's underwater photo contest being held July 1 to August 31. Categories include Tropical Coral Reefs and California Rocky Reefs. Winners get an assortment of dive gear, and the overall winner's prize is a five-day liveaboard on the Maldives liveaboard *Manthiri* (for one person only, though). Details are at www.reefcheck.org.

Lionfish Invasion. Since feeble-minded aquarists started dumping unwanted lionfish into Florida waters less than two decades ago, the fish has become a threat to the entire Caribbean ecosystem. There is no anti-venom for their sting, which can send victims to the hospital and even result in death. They're a bold fish with no predators. Other reef fish, which have not developed a natural fear, are easy prey. One study shows that one lionfish can deplete 79 percent of a reef in five weeks. Find out how you can help at www.reef.org.

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Undercurrent

3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102
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Fax 415-289-0137

undercurrenteditor@undercurrent.org

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Undercurrent

3020 Bridgeway, Suite 102
Sausalito, CA 94965

Editorial Office

Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor
Vanessa Eichardson, Senior Editor

E-mail:

BenDavison@undercurrent.org

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