

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

August 2014

Vol. 29, No. 8

Indigo Dive and Dive St. Vincent, St. Vincent *still macro nirvana, now sans the “curmudgeon” factor*

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www.undercurrent.org

Editorial Office:
Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor
3020 Bridgeway
Sausalito, CA 94965
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

Dear Fellow Diver:

Wading out to the awning-covered, 23-foot A Touch of Glass, a stone's throw from the non-descript digs of Indigo Dive, I handed my gear to divemaster Keon Murray and said hello to Krishon Browne, the boat driver, both pleasant locals in their 20s on the job for about six months. Just like to most of the sites out of Buccament Bay Resort, it would be a quick five- to 10-minute ride. After descending, I warmed up my camera with shots of a spotted cleaner shrimp. Minutes later, I spotted an odd string with black bands moving like a cross between a worm and a limp strand of fish poop (I later learned it was a black-banded ribbon worm). Then Keon pointed out a long-snout seahorse and a colony of warty corallimorph that turned a rock into a blaze of fluorescent orange. While Keon would come check on me once in a while if I lagged too far behind the group, he watched less experienced divers like a hawk.

I had dived St. Vincent five years ago, but this time, the variety of common reef fish -- trumpetfish, big eye, blackbar soldierfish, yellowtail damselfish, a flying gurnard and spotted drum -- actually surprised me. Why? Back then, my guide was the notoriously off-putting but talented and often charming Bill Tewes of Dive St. Vincent. Bill's forte was finding the uncommon -- typical reef fish wasted his time, he told me. Part of my quest on this trip was to discover firsthand how diving with Indigo Dive, the island's other dive shop, compared with Dive St. Vincent, now that



Indigo Dive's A Touch of Glass



the mercurial but eagle-eyed Bill was no longer at its helm, having moved to the U.S. for medical care.

On this day I was glad to be diving at all. Earlier, I had watched Dive Indigo's staff bail out one of their fiberglass boats that had mysteriously overturned and nearly submerged in the middle of the night, apparently without a single witness from the resort. Its big outboard motor was still attached. I felt like I was part of a drama involving the good, the bad and the ugly.

The night before, I'd only experienced the good, walking across a romantically-lit footbridge over the Buccament River into the pricey Buccament Bay Resort, located on the east coast north of Kingstown, St Vincent's hub. From the airport, it's a half-hour ride through fascinating cultural territory and rugged terrain. A warm welcome from Monica, the neatly-dressed manager and her front desk staff, plus a potent rum concoction, made my brain do a happy dance. Buccament Bay is an ambitious, sprawling resort. It wraps its guests in a Disney-like cocoon -- I felt like a king surrounded by staff who were well-trained, friendly and eager to please. Besides the on-site Indigo Dive shop, amenities include a variety of restaurants, water sports, tennis courts, a fitness/weight room, cricket and "football" soccer fields, beautiful infinity pools, nightly bonfires and lovely white sand beaches facing the setting sun. Winding sidewalks connect the 50 duplexes with views of the surrounding lush mountainsides.

Whisked to my room via golf cart by a personable young man named Alaska, I was impressed by my spacious Deluxe Garden Villa, an unexpected upgrade to a two-room, air-conditioned suite. A mini-fridge was stocked with free beer, pop, bottled water and a bottle of champagne. A gleaming one-cup Lavazza espresso-coffeemaker sat on the countertop. Thick bathrobes hung outside the shower. A towel elephant festooned with flowers perched on the king-sized bed. But the devil lurked in the details. A faint odor of sewer gas (no sink-trap?) greeted me whenever I stooped to wash my face in the bathroom. There were plenty of European-style electrical outlets, but they required an adapter/converter for U.S.-style electronics and battery chargers, and the front desk was in short supply. The triple-head shower was elegant but usually lacked hot water despite my calls for maintenance. The resort's grounds were nicely manicured but the trek to the dive boat was a long hike.

On day two, I dived with Indigo Dive's owner, Kay Wilson. After backrolling in at Carlos Cove, she spotted an emperor helmet conch devouring a sand dollar. I turned over another sand dollar, spying a tiny pea crab. A half-inch bumblebee shrimp hid between the spines of a variegated urchin. Kay, who spent most of her dive spearing lionfish, would occasionally get my attention to point out such critters as two tiny elkhorn coral crabs, one nestled in the crook of a spectacular elkhorn. Her clientele (typically families or one-dive-a-day customers from the U.K.) had lots of reef fish to see. Niggles like less-than-full aluminum 80s and visibility that rarely exceeded 40 feet scarcely mattered. Boats were uncrowded, with just three to eight divers. Most dives sites were close to the resort, some of which I'd explored when diving with Bill's Dive St. Vincent years before. I could dive my own profile, poke along for 60-70 minutes, and still stay toasty in early March's 80-degree water in my 5-mil Farmer John and hooded 5-mil top (I had bought the "10-mil at the torso" two-piece after shivering through one too many sub-80-degree Caribbean dives. When critter shooting, I am often not moving enough to generate my own heat).

As for Kay, I admired the ability of this strong, cheerful and helpful forty-something woman to leap from the orbit of talented divemaster into the deep end of the pool as a dive shop owner, where she must cater to a wide range of ages, skill levels, interests and personalities. While Bill Tewes ran a muck diving operation, Kay's clientele seemed more inclined to look for pretty fish. However, on my third morning, Keon asked me, "Are you up for some muck diving?" I was eager to see what he would offer. I descended in a field strewn with tires, where I spotted an octopus doing its best to mimic a rock. Hmmm. I found an emblemariopsis blenny (it's not in Humann's book, but it's in Reefnet's Reef Fish Identification software), a coral clinging crab and a solitary sponge hydroid I'd not seen before. Members of St. Vincent's fish nursery darted in and out of the sea grass: juvenile greenblotch parrotfish, an initial-phase bucktooth parrotfish, and a juvenile blackear wrasse. Back on shore, Kay asked whether Keon had taken us to the "great muck diving" in front of the resort. She was upset he hadn't. Oh well, it's the luck of the draw when you are just an ordinary vacationing diver and aren't hiring a guide just to find something special.

Evenings at Buccament Bay were spent in utter self-indulgence. My reasonable diet was shattered by the long list of choices at the resort's two restaurants. One example of a dinner: lobster bisque, smoked salmon platter with capers arranged in rosettes, seaweed salad, followed by a tender lamb osso bucco with garlic mashed potatoes, sautéed greens and fresh citrus gremolata. At breakfast, I would hit the buffet for a fresh omelet (sometimes adding crab or smoked salmon just because), maybe with a sausage frittata on the side. For my health, I'd spoon a plate of mandarin oranges, grapefruit sections and exotic lychee nut. Lunch might be followed by a stop at the on-premises ice cream shop for scoops of chocolate-chip ice cream in a waffle cone. All the food, ice cream and beverages, adult or otherwise, were covered in my all-inclusive meal plan.

But I must add that there is a spooky air of mystery about the resort. In the background loomed an impressive hotel-like structure (completion pending), the ghostly concrete skeleton of a second hotel-like framework and a number of unfinished duplexes hidden behind a tall board fence. The resort's business plan was to sell units to individuals, who would offer them for rent most of the year. But some of the units had been flooded when the Buccament River overflowed during a torrential rain that turned Christmas 2013 into a deadly tragedy.

Leaving the mysteries mixed with hedonism behind, I switched gears and headed off to the venerable Young Island Resort and Dive St. Vincent (DSV). I wanted to see what things were like now that Bill Tewes is no longer on the scene. I transferred to Young Island's ferry dock, next to Dive St. Vincent, via Buccament Bay's courtesy shuttle. The 50-minute trip included a stop at a market to pick up some booze because Young Island's meal plan doesn't cover adult beverages. The free water taxi crossed the narrow waterway in five minutes. Cottages dotted the steep, lush hillside of this private island. The flower-bordered stone path to the reception area, past the thatched roofs of the main buildings, was idyllic. My "superior" air-conditioned cottage, surrounded on two sides by screened jalousie windows, was a stone's throw from the dock. The bathroom opened to an outdoor shower overlooking the harbor, screened from the outside by a Dutch door. There were plenty of 110-volt

Jean-Michel Cousteau Will Open Up Shop on Petit St. Vincent

Jean-Michel Cousteau will open a dive center on the privately owned 115-acre Petit St. Vincent, 40 miles south of St. Vincent, by the end of the year. The dive center will operate independently of the island's resort, but will share some facilities, including the existing dock and boathouse. It will offer guided dives and PADI certifications for all levels. An on-staff naturalist/marine biologist will offer guided underwater tours and hikes around the island to educate guests about the area's marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

Cousteau is also involved in a dive operation in Fiji, at a hotel on Vanua Levu that bears his name.

outlets and a desk to serve as my camera table. The bedroom opened onto a huge private veranda.

"After doing more than 300 Caribbean dives, I was still shooting critters I had seen for the first time."

At 9 a.m. the next morning, Don Carlos (but call him "DJ"), a St. Vincentian who has worked at DSV more than 20 years, picked me up at the Young Island dock. I boarded Sunfish, the shop's fat yellow and blue, locally-built boat. Two Yamaha 200HP outboards sped us to more distant sites within 30 minutes; others were next to Young Island. My typical daily dive mates were one to five vacationing American professionals who came to shoot critters. Ray

Haberman, a retired American and a published underwater photographer, joined us. As Bill's friend, Ray has spent months each year pretty much volunteering at DSV. He stayed on board due to a mild case of the bends acquired while lionfish hunting -- he had dived a sawtooth profile that didn't trigger his dive computer, he said. One night, he lent me a thick deck of laminated cards he had made to help him identify unique critters he has photographed, many of them "NIBs" (not in books). I took photos of his cards to help me identify critters back home.

Once underwater, DJ started exploring a series of "condos" that Ray has set up over the years, small sheets of corrugated roofing anchored by a rock on top. As DJ gently lifted each "roof," I captured one rarity after another: a spotless snapping shrimp, a rusty goby, some smooth-claw snapping shrimp and an arceye flatworm. DJ spotted a black long-snout seahorse, and I shot an angular brittle star, a red-ridged clinging crab, a charming porcelain crab, a speck-claw decorator crab, and a flower garden yellow snapping shrimp. DJ alerted me to a juvenile scorpionfish -- looking nothing like the ugly adult we swam by a few minutes later -- then a velvet shrimp. The day's dives were capped when DJ spotted a red frogfish virtually indistinguishable from the red sponge it clung to. Reviewing the day's images with my spouse over sundowners, I was gobsmacked. After more than 300 Caribbean dives, I was still shooting critters for the first time.

The next day got off to a fast start as I came across a juvenile batwing crab, a beautiful red seahorse, a pretty yellow and black juvenile jackknife, a sea frost with its delicate white worms outstretched, and a white-nosed pipefish. I was entranced by an Antillean fileclam, measuring about an inch across, with light tan shell and beautiful, plump orange flesh extending pale translucent tentacles. (DJ identifies critters on an erasable slate.) Opening more condos, we found a smooth-claw snapping shrimp, a spider-like, pink-eyed spoteye hermit crab, a two-claw shrimp so translucent its internal organs were on view, followed by a purple-shelled porcelain crab. A bristly-legged, red-ridged clinging crab looked menacing through my viewfinder until I remembered it was only a half-inch across its carapace.

On Young Island, guests dined in thatched huts at the edge of the beach. Except for a buffet here and there, meals were ordered off the menu. All started with freshly-baked breads (cinnamon, raisin, banana, wheat, white and coconut). My breakfasts here were usually less calorie-laden than those at Buccament Bay: orange juice with nibbles off my spouse's fruit plate, local yogurt (plumrose was the best), followed by a two- or three-egg omelet with toast and jam. I couldn't pass up Young Island's signature breakfast dish: a rum-soaked flaming French toast topped in coconut. A late lunch followed my two daily morning dives. I enjoyed the Caesar salad, a mini-pizza crowned with eggplant, sweet peppers and mozzarella cheese (just an appetizer), and kingfish with grilled veggies.



Young Island Resort

Choices during the three-course dinners included eggplant salad, pumpkin soup, a chickpea hummus, goat cheese ravioli with horseradish butter sauce, fettuccini, coconut rum-basted pork tenderloin with currant dressing, or salmon, finishing with coconut rum ice cream. Portions were modest, but my shorts felt too tight after days of nonstop feasting.

Calvert "Callie" Richards, with DSV 30-plus years, led my next two days. He more or less runs the shop with DJ and Jackie Samuel, a cheerful woman who answered my emails promptly. Callie's large exterior is imposing, but he's friendly within minutes of conversation. He said that though Bill still owns DSV, they now make ends meet by leasing their larger boat to cruise ship excursion operators and by selling air fills.

On the first of my next four dives I went solo, exploring boulders near the shoreline. I found a white-spot engine sea snail and a knobby, gaudy cantharus whelk. Diving under and near the boat, I imaged a bear-trap-like Atlantic thorny oyster and a West Indian star snail, followed by puffy purple fuzball alga, a white spotted filefish and a balloonfish whose eyes held deep clusters of green galaxies. The steel plus-rated tanks were usually at 2500 psi, dives lasted as long as 90 minutes, but water temps were now as low as 75 degrees.

The following day, I enjoyed an array of marine life "classics" found on my other great Caribbean dives: seahorse, short-finger neck crab, lanternfish and cute banded butterflyfish juveniles. A plump, inch-long, hydroid-eating Engel's flabellina (a sea slug) deposited eggs on sea grass. Ray's encouragement to search under rocks fired me up to find an angular brittle star and a blunt-spined brittle star. A little white ornate scallop, daubed in short red brush-strokes, topped another great dive.

DJ led on my last day. A haunting memory was seeing a long stretch of line on the sea floor, at least a quarter-inch thick. Every three feet or so, long stainless hooks were attached by super high-test filament -- a sober reminder to dive with good cutting tools. Combing the area for anything out of place, I came across a rare fingerprint cyphoma (flamingo tongue) cloaked in a distinctive fingerprint pattern, and, at the very end of the dive, a gaudy clown crab. At Ray's Place, DJ took us to a yellow frogfish nestled in an orange tubulate sponge, its black spots mimicked openings on the sponge. The day ended with images of marine life that would crown any Caribbean dive, including a ciliated false squilla (false mantis shrimp), and an initial-phase slippery dick. In all, I'd seen some 34 personal firsts while diving with DSV, six of which I still haven't been able to identify.

On the last day, my spouse and I hiked the small island's scenic grounds. A mesmerizing surf crashed to shore at one overlook. Next to the island is old Fort Duvernette, some 200 feet atop a solitary basalt pinnacle. I gave my

Indigo Dive/Buccament Bay

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

Dive St. Vincent/Young Island

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

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

Caribbean Scale

Olympus TG-2 pocket camera a full-immersion baptism while snorkeling in front of the resort, quickly capturing passable images of a variety of typical reef fish. The resort owns a couple of sailing yachts that can be rented for either a few hours' excursion or for a "Sailaway" package that includes overnights on the boat while sailing. The island offers a white sandy beach, a tennis court, kayaks and a small sailboat. And it's up for sale -- got \$10 million to spare?

I could have taken half a dozen Caribbean dive trips elsewhere and still not found the number of personal firsts I saw in my 10 days on St. Vincent. Comparing the two resorts, I'd say Buccament Bay was a sybarite's playground. It wasn't cheap and I was annoyed by the unpredictable hot water, but thanks to Kay Wilson's handling my combination dive/resort package, it was no more expensive than my time with Young Island Resort and DSV. Indigo Divers offered dive freedom and a handful of nice firsts, but I lacked a seasoned guide much of the time. [Note from Ben: One of their young guides, Michael "Richie" Richards, was seriously bent while doing a personal dive in November, according to news reports.] Young Island Resort offers an idyllic tropical setting for those who can afford their tariff. Meals were tasty and expertly served, but the menu became a bit repetitious. DSV has the advantage of not being tied to a specific resort, so it can arrange much less expensive accommodations (a number of suitable hotels -- the Mariner, for example -- are within a short walk of DSV, with one-week dive packages in the neighborhood of \$1,000 per person). DSV's expert, pleasant staff helped me experience the largest concentration of unusual and macro-level marine life I have found anywhere in the Caribbean.

-- S.P.



Divers Compass: Buccament Bay cost me \$500 a night, double occupancy, for an all-inclusive (most alcohol, too) package, with transfers and no automatic service fees; six dives with Indigo Dive, including fins and BC, cost \$405, plus tips . . . With Dive St. Vincent/Young Island Resort, I got a seven-nights-for-the-price-of-five package (includes an automatic 10 percent service fee), with a full meal plan and 10 dives (tips not included) for \$3,395 . . . I flew to Barbados, then it's a quick flight to St. Vincent via reliable SVG Air (www.svgair.com)

for \$393 round-trip . . . My \$125 overnight in Barbados at the clean and roomy Monterey Apartment Hotel (monteray@caribsurf.com) was a good buy compared to the expensive accommodations elsewhere on "The Gap," a restaurant and shopping district in Christ Church; it was a hoot to down Banks

\$740 for a "Life Experience" (and T-Shirts)

Rocket Frog owner Michael Kruchawski did not like the way we characterized his Costa Rica internship program in last month's issue, writing that his interns don't clean the pools or bathrooms. "We have a service that cleans the pool, and a maid service that cleans our bathrooms . . . The cost of the dive master internship is \$740 [which includes] all course materials, three T-shirts and use of all dive equipment during the internship . . . Each one dives 80 to 140 dives during the six-week program . . . The interns learn how to be excellent divemasters, how to mix gases, how to maintain equipment, inspect and clean tanks; they learn point-of-sale operations and customer service, seamanship and boat operations . . . Interns require a good deal of mentoring to be successful, and the permanent local staff provides that guidance.

"With the exception of the Costa Ricans who wanted to work in the recreational dive industry, none of our other interns have sought employment diving with the exception of one -- she moved on to become an instructor and has since moved to the Philippines for work . . . Eighty percent of our interns are in Costa Rica participating in the program for a life experience! They are not seeking future employment at this time in the dive industry, even though they leave here fully qualified to do so."

Caribbean Lagers while sitting with locals outside the grocery store just across the street . . . Websites: Indigo Dive - www.indigodive.com; Buccament Bay Resort - www.buccamentbay.com; Dive St. Vincent - www.divestvincent.com; Young Island Resort - www.youngisland.com

Geko Dive, Bali, Indonesia

five-star muck and reef diving for all budgets

Dear Fellow Diver:

After an intensive dive trip on the Bilikiki for 10 days (for a full review of the Solomon Island vessel, see Undercurrent's May 2012 issue), my dive buddy and I planned a couple's retreat to Bali to wallow in tasteful luxury, dive a bit and relax before heading home. In fact, if you dive anywhere in Indonesia, Bali is a must stop.

Our hotel of choice was Amankila. Its location on the east coast, near the town of Manggis, places it near choice diving, and the hilly terrain, gorgeous three-tier infinity pool, scrumptious food, warm service and personal spa services provide the ultimate antidote to the rigors of liveaboard living, no matter how terrific. (Indeed, I love the Bilikiki. This was my third trip, and Daniela and Csaba, the new cruise leaders, are probably the vessel's best ever.) At the Denpasar airport, a delegate from Amankila whisked us through immigration and customs (an expedited visa is US\$25 a person). Ninety minutes later, we arrived at our digs (some celebrities, I understand, take a helicopter to avoid the drive), and two beautiful young girls in elegant local garb offered floral blessings as the English-speaking staff welcomed us.

Diving in east Bali, particularly at nearby sites like Nusa Penida, Amed, Seraya, Tulamben, Manta Point and Padang Bai, is part of the draw of Amankila. Unlike the hotels in touristy Nusa Dua or Kuta, this location puts you within 15 minutes of many dive sites -- and it's an hour to the revered diving at Tulamben. In the past, I always used the excellent Aquamarine Diving, but this time I let Amankila arrange our diving with Geko Dive, the oldest shop on the east coast. It's owned by European expats Cedric Saveuse, Olivia Harding and James Rees, and they offer diving from the Nusa Penida area to Tulamben. It's a serious operation that even offers tech diving courses. I asked James for pure muck diving because we had done so much pelagic diving in the Solomons, so he selected a partially built and abandoned jetty in Padang Bai, less than 10 minutes by boat from the dive shop. A treasure trove for muck divers. I could easily spend three dives a day for two weeks at this site alone.

After an easy backroll near the pier, I descended to 40 feet. Visibility is typically low, maybe 20 feet at best, currents low to moderate, and the water warm. The guides worked hard to find interesting critters. I wore a light wetsuit and gloves because garbage and hydroids abound, and fishermen have baited lines in the water. My log reflects muck diving joy: "inimicus (demon stingers) galore; mantis shrimp of every hue and size; two types of rhinopias (frilled and paddle)." I sighted a rare crocodile snake eel poking out of the sand, its massive toothy jaw belying its shyness. Sandy-grained



Geko Dive's Sea Star



cuttlefish hovered in pairs, while heavy-bodied, 12- to 18-inch pipefish courted and snuffled for food. The pilings revealed a mammoth frogfish larger than a football. In the junk at the base of the pilings, I found a pair of frogfish the size of large softballs, one a snowy white perched next to a jet black hairy frogfish. Though few would label stonefish as "cute," the hot pink juvenile I found came close. Scorpionfish abounded in every hue. Large fearless octopuses hung out on low coral heads, while the one large coral head nearby housed a huge school of adult eel catfish, presumably there for mating. My log notes describe them as "frenetic, disgusting, yet fascinat-

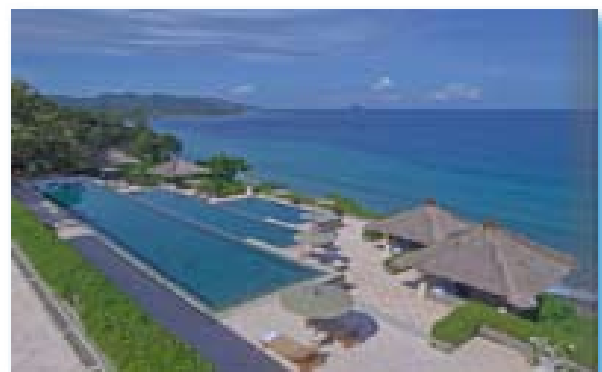
ing." Perhaps my greatest delight was realizing that the drifting chunks of palm leaf were actually robust ghost pipefish pairs.

As part of the muck dive program, Geko took us to Seraya, just north of Amed, for a pair of shore dives. The rough entry was fine, though I earned no style points as I crawled out on hands and knees after the dives. Compared with the abundance at the jetty, Seraya was less satisfying, with strong currents and patchier life. However, I enjoyed the variety of lionfish, crinoid crabs, shrimpfishes and giant trevallies darting through the murky waters. Seraya's sand bottom, like Tulamben's, is volcanic dark sand, so when currents whip it up, visibility drops dramatically.

Why don't more people dive this part of Bali? Though some sites have powerful currents and downcurrents where the Indian and Pacific oceans mix between Bali and Lombok (see Undercurrent's March 2014 issue regarding some Japanese divers who died here), the coral and life one sees is worth it for the experienced diver. According to an article in the Jakarta Post, scientists conducted a survey in May 2011 at 33 sea sites around Bali. They discovered 952 species of reef fish, eight of which were new discoveries. Another pleasant surprise was reading that the east coast of Bali surpassed the rest of the island for coral coverage.

Reef coverage ranges from patchy to dense around Padang Bai and between Bali and Lombok. There are some sheltered sites with virtually no current and relaxed reef diving (often accompanied by a beach BBQ lunch). The diving around the small islands offers great variety. Nusa Penida is best known for mantas and pelagics, particularly mola mola, known as ocean sunfish. The currents can be unpredictable, and thermoclines are common. Your reward for braving the waters is dense reefs populated with fish, and a great mix of reef and pelagics. If the currents are kicking, appreciating the minutiae of reef life as it whizzes past is challenging, but the quieter sites allow you to putter around varieties of anemonefishes, clouds of anthias and butterflyfish galore. Great "normal" and very safe diving can be found at Tulamben.

If you're a culture vulture, this part of Bali is heaven. Dance and musical groups play less for tourists than for themselves. Most hotels offer evening performances by the local players. I love the weaving village of Tenganan for fabrics, particularly the exquisite double ikats (gerinsing) made by Ibu Sudiata Gelgel.



Amankila's Three-Tiered Infinity Pool

Amankila is a pricey retreat, best reserved for special -- very special -- occasions. It is built in terraces down the steep hill to its black sand beach. Each villa is set within the landscape for the most privacy, and views are of the ocean and the tropical garden. The rooms (actually suites) provide a deluxe bath, sitting area with a Bose stereo and iPod loaded with music to suit all tastes, bedroom and terrace, where we ate breakfast each morning. The in-room WiFi was fast. Oddly, the floors are so full of nonconductive materials, when I walked barefoot and touched a laptop or tablet, I was treated to a full 220-volt shock. Wear the in-room flip flops before finding out! The resort's iconic, three-tier infinity pool seems to teeter on the edge of the cliff. At beach level, an Olympic-size pool and bar offers guests more swimming and service, and one can get massages on the beach in little bures. The restaurant offers both Indonesian and Western dishes. I enjoyed poached eggs and bacon for breakfast one day, followed by nasi goreng the next, and while I tended to eat the Indonesian dishes, my craving for an American hamburger was completely satisfied.

Besides splurging on Amankila, beautiful hotels dot the coast, from the Malaysian-owned chain of Alila in Manggis to small divers' hotels in Padang Bai. The popular Puri Bagus in Candidasa is a great value and romantically situated on the water; large rooms go for around \$200. Its sister hotel, Puri Bagus Manggis, offers cultural immersion in the village of Manngis at similar prices; both offer dive packages. The Alila Manggis, about the same price, is near Amankila, and its smallish rooms offer the amenities of a large resort. Bloo Lagoon (in two locations in Padang Bai), are styled as eco-resorts, and in addition to diving and eating, they offer traditional medicine and spa treatments. Prices can be as low as \$100 a night if booking a package. The Watergarden in Candidasa sits near the village, with views of the mountains and foliage. Like all local hotels, it offers diving, and its bures run around \$200 with a package. The small divers' hotels in Padang Bai, such as Kerti Beach Inn and Bamboo Paradise, offer simple accommodations near the beach as low as \$40 a night. Geko Dive can help you find one to suit your needs.

For my next trip to Bali, I will certainly allot at least a week to dive around Padang Bai and loll in the muck under its jetty. Geko's James Rees says he has even more great sites for muck fanciers. And the pelagic dives I eschewed on this trip offer mantas, mola-molas in season and ripping currents filled with life. For ease of diving, species delight, luxury, beauty and romance, Bali's east coast can't be beat.

--M.M.

Geko Dive / Amankila, Bali	
Diving (<i>experienced</i>)	★★★★
Diving (<i>beginner</i>)	★★★
Snorkelling	★★★
Accommodations	★★★★★
Food	★★★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★
★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent World Scale	



Divers Compass: Amankila rates start at \$950 per night, including transfers and full breakfast; add 10 percent for service and 11 percent for tax . . . Diving Geko through Amankila (there seems to be a little markup) costs between \$95-125 for two tanks and \$160 for three, and that includes lunch, equipment rental, drinks and transport; at the end of the trip, they washed and dried my gear until even my booties smelled sweet . . . Flying to Bali (Denpasar) is easy, with flights from Europe,

Drop the Dive Travel Weight: Part II

how to pare down your clothes and gear to just one bag

Even fit divers could stand to shed some pounds when it comes to packing for their next dive trip. Do you really need long-sleeved anything for a Caribbean trip? Could you lose some bulk if you buy newer photography gear? We continue with more tips from our Undercurrent contributors on how they shed weight to spare themselves from airlines' multiple and ever-increasing baggage fees.

Do You Really Need to Dress Up for Diving?

Obviously, the rule "less is more" applies when it comes to packing clothes for dive trips, but it also applies to the type of luggage you pack it in. Ken Kurtis, owner of the dive shop Reef Seekers in Beverly Hills, CA, and frequent leader of dive trips around the world, recommends looking at the weight of your checked bags. "If you've only got 50 pounds to deal with, do you really want to give up a large percentage of that weight with a heavy bag? Some older suitcases may weigh 15 pounds, while many lighter ones nowadays are as little as seven pounds."

Maurine Shimlock packs her clothes around her camera equipment. "I don't need to use unnecessary packing material, just T-shirts and shorts I'll wear on my trip."

Dean Knudsen (Golden Valley, MN) dropped four pounds by using the Eagle Creek Crossroads Roll-Away as his primary checked bag. "There's no internal frame, but it still rolls well. I can pack 10 days' worth of gear in it, and it folds compactly to shove under the liveaboard bunk."

Shawn McDermott (Melbourne, FL) ditched his heavy roller bag for a vinyl-coated, wheeled mesh bag, and bought a \$20 luggage scale to help him prepare for trips. John Woolley switched to duffle bags. "I bought NorthFace duffle bags which only weigh about two pounds; they're tough and their bright colors make it virtually impossible to mistake your luggage for anyone else's."

Underwater photographer and *Undercurrent* contributor Maurine Shimlock packs her clothes around her camera equipment. That means I don't need to use unnecessary packing material, just the T-shirts, shorts, etc., I'll wear on the trip."

Take only what you need for clothes. Frequent *Undercurrent* contributor Bret Gilliam's packing list is a good example. "On a liveaboard, you don't need anything other than T-shirts, shorts, maybe a sweatshirt, a pair of comfortable drawstring pants, sandals, a hat, sunglasses, your iPod, and headphones. What the hell are you going to dress up for?"

Speaking of other forms of entertainment, Elizabeth Eby (Mountain View, CA) recommends buying the lightweight Amazon Kindle. "Moving 10 books to a six-ounce device pays for itself the first time you use it overseas."

Some readers recommend dropping weight by switching to certain clothing brands and materials. Dean Knudsen, a very creative dresser, dropped half a pound by switching to quick-dry wicking polyester t-shirts. "Two shirts for a 10-day trip; they wash in a sink, and can be dry in five minutes. Pay \$30 at REI, or pay \$12 at Kohl's for the FILA brand. Gray or black does not readily reveal stains and grime." He drops another quarter-pound with a pair of lightweight Sportif USA shorts (www.sportif.com/shorts). "They're

polyester and rapid dry. I drop another 0.15 pounds by using ExOfficio underwear (www.exofficio.com), two pairs for seven days, wash in the sink, and dry in the sun after 30 minutes. By stripping down to the essentials, I routinely weigh in at 46 pounds of checked gear, and I still have the luxury of full-sized fins, a 1mm vest, mini-video camera, and regular dive camera with flash."

In his Stahlsac Jamaican Smuggler bag, weighing 9.7 pounds, James Morus (Cleveland, OH), brings Under Armour compression shorts to dive in, and his wife puts on an Under Armour shirt (www.underarmour.com). "We bring a little plastic container of Oxywash and wash clothes in our room. After the dive, I have two pairs of lightweight shorts, one with the zip-off legs, that wash and dry as quickly as the Under Armour stuff. I wear tomorrow's dive shirt as today's shirt."

Scott Pillifant (Flower Mound, TX) used to take cotton shirts, but now substitutes lightweight nylon Nike shirts. "If they get dirty or stinky, I dunk them in the tub for rinsing wetsuits, and ta da, my wife can stand me again."

Kurtis also has a pared-down shopping list, but the formal clothing he always brings is a collared polo shirt. "I've always felt that if there's any shot at getting a seat upgrade on the way down or back from a dive trip, I stand a better chance of getting it if I look nice rather than if I look like a schlub."

Pare Down the Photography Gear

It's not uncommon for serious photographers to carry a huge camera, strobes, and a laptop, but how should one pare down the load, not only to reduce baggage fees but to reduce the stress of transporting such delicate gear?

Well, here's another opportunity to spend a lot of money to replace your decent equipment (maybe it is growing old and can use upgrading) with lightweight substitutes. Jim Reilly once housed his Canon PowerShot G11 in an Ikelite acrylic case, and used twin DS 51 strobes triggered by a light metering device. "The carry-on dedicated to this gear was too heavy to handle. So I replaced the camera with a Canon S95, a pocket version of the G11. I replaced the heavy, bulky housing with an aluminum case. I replaced the arms with titanium ones, and replaced the strobes with Inon S2000s triggered by fiber optics. I also bought rechargeable batteries. Overall, I get pretty much the same photographic results with a new rig weighing

Can Congress Eliminate Lionfish?

We divers know too well the damage created by the rapidly reproducing, voracious lionfish invading coral reefs in the Atlantic and the Caribbean. Now lionfish has caught the attention of one non-diving U.S. Congressman. Steve Southerland, a Republican representing Florida's Second Congressional District (between Panama City and Tallahassee).

While attending a meeting on Gulf of Mexico fish management in Key West, he met with Bill Kelly, a diver and executive director of the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association, to learn about the lionfish that are now taking over the reefs in his home town of Panama City. Kelly showed Southerland a lionfish in an aquarium, and explained efforts now being considered to launch a commercial lionfish trapping program off Florida's coast.

"Thousands of recreational divers have observed growing numbers of them at Florida dive sites," said Kelly. "However, these densities pale in comparison to lionfish aggregations found deeper . . . our commercial lobster trappers have seen denser populations of lionfish in much deeper waters, from 100 to 300 feet," said Kelly. "By developing the right trapping methods, lionfish could become a very valuable consumer commodity while [we protect] our ecosystems." He says if a commercial trapping program gets started, "we'll tie in a consumer awareness and educational program, leading to bigger demand for these fish in more restaurants and grocery store fish counters."

Kelly says Southerland was "very concerned" and indicated he would call for a subcommittee hearing before the House Natural Resources Committee, on which he sits. However, given that this Congress believes government is the problem, not the solution, we can expect little to happen.

just under four pounds. I saved something like six pounds.” Reilly says he is looking at Mirrorless cameras and housings, which “are still a lot lighter than DSLR systems; however, this is not an inexpensive option!”

After reviewing camera options, Scott Pillifant decided on a Nikon ColorPix AW110. “No housing required and warranted to 60 feet, but I’ve taken it deeper and had no problems. For my type of picture/video requirements both on land and in water, it is more than satisfactory.”

Kurtis recommends taking a good look at the gear you actually used on your last trip, and thinking ahead to the next trip and what you’ll be shooting, then limit your gear to that which you will use. “On some trips, I know I won’t shoot wide, so I leave the 10-24 lens and the port home. On other trips I won’t be doing macro, so the 105 and the port stay behind. And if you’re going to use a lens on only one or two dives, is there another lens that will give you the same result?”

Also give thought to your batteries, he says. “I made the error of taking a trip with dual strobes that each required four C batteries. Given that I would change my batteries every day, I brought 48 C batteries, which weighed a ton. ‘What about rechargeables,’ you might be saying. Good thought, but you will need multiple sets so you can have a set in your strobe and a set charging. You don’t save that much weight and you’ll have more gizmos to deal with. For years, I’ve only shot with strobes that use AA batteries. I get 48 AA batteries from Costco, about \$10. I’ll shoot them for a day or so, and then I give them to the dive guides for their radios or kids’ toys. My cameras, by the way, both use rechargeable batteries, and I can get about 600-800 shots per charge. They almost always last a full day, so I bring one battery for each camera. I sometimes bring a back-up rechargeable, just in case.”

After a 40-year career as a professional photographer, Gilliam says the ritual of packing multiple camera gear into a separate duffle bag has become too tedious to deal with anymore, and his current choice is GoPro. “I was blown away by the quality of its latest cameras for both still images and video. Those devices fit in the palm of your hand and produce outstanding results. I just ordered a GoPro system from Backscatter and will use it on upcoming professional projects. I’m leaving my Nikon and its bulky housing behind, and I can fit the entire GoPro system in my gear duffel. One bag to check! I’m a believer.”

Not every tip here will work for every traveling diver, but hopefully some of our suggestions will help you devise a plan for dive clothes and gear that will not only make your traveling easier, but will ensure money stays in your pocket, not into the airline’s.

– Vanessa Richardson

Fire Aboard!

how John Bantin escaped a burning Red Sea liveaboard

On July 28, the comfortable liveaboard *Blue Melody* had just moored at the popular Red Sea dive site of the *Thistlegorm* wreck after our dive at Shag Rock shortly before. Several other boats were there, and this was to be significant. We were all taking it easy during the surface interval and contemplating the dive we were about to undertake on the iconic WWII vessel that had fallen victim to a suicide raid by a German Heinkel bomber out of Crete. Sha’ab Ali was meant to be a safe anchorage out of range of the Germans at that time, and a multitude of ships were anchored, waiting to unload the war materiel they carried, intended for Operation Crusader, the British Army’s campaign to drive Rommel out of North Africa in late 1941.

As I lay on a sofa in the saloon, taking it easy, I suddenly noticed the lights starting to flash in a random manner. There was something wrong with the electrical system. This was immediately followed by a loud shout from the dive deck. The engineer ran past me and hurtled down towards the engine room. A curl of

Regulator-Removing Diver Charged with Terroristic Threatening

In our June issue, we wrote about how Jay Lovell, a fish collector in West Hawaii, attacked diver Rene Umberger in May when she and other divers approached him underwater and filmed him as he collected fish to sell for aquariums. Hawaii County Prosecutor's Office said then that an assault charge would be unlikely because Umberger was not injured, even though Lovell pulled her regulator out of her mouth while she was 50 feet below the surface. Apparently, the Prosecutors' Office changed its opinion, as it recently charged Lovell with a second-degree charge of "terroristic threatening," which is a misdemeanor.

"It's an appropriate charge," Umberger told *West Hawaii Today*. She said people have approached her since the incident to talk about their concerns about the fish collecting practice. "People have expressed gratitude for documenting this," Umberger said.

But Lovell's brother, Jim Lovell, who also collects reef fish says Umberger should have been charged as well. He told *West Hawaii Today* that Umberger made statements last year at a meeting in Kona that she was planning to "sic" Sea Shepherd on local fish collectors (Umberger was on a Sea Shepherd boat when the incident happened) and he blames her for the whole mess. "The fishermen did not go looking for the Sea Shepherd boat, they were just doing their job. It is very clear that Rene Umberger and her associates were responsible for this incident. Simply put, if they had stayed home and left the fishermen alone, nothing would of happened."

black smoke warned that a fire had started. This black smoke soon became thick. The dive guides immediately went to the cabins below decks to warn any passengers that they might need to come to the emergency muster point. This was the deck immediately above the dive deck, itself covering the engine room and soon immersed in thick, acrid black smoke.

The passengers moved to the sun deck, where crew took roll. We waited anxiously as the crew fought the fire, but they weren't making headway -- the fire was getting out of control. At this point, it dawned on us that the sundeck might have only been a good place to be if the boat sank and rolled over. It was where the life rafts were deployed, but it was not a good place for most of us to jump from, as the water was 40 feet below. One of the dive guides had retrieved our passports from the wheelhouse and had them safely secured in a watertight pouch. Otherwise, what we had with us was simply what we were wearing when the emergency call was made, which amounted in some cases to precious little. One of the crew was making an SOS call on a handheld VHF radio, while the others rushed about retrieving fire extinguishers from anywhere they could find them on the vessel. The smoke was getting worse, and the deck above the dive deck was becoming untenably hot. Other inflatables from the surrounding boats gathered round the swim platform while more fire extinguishers were offered. The smell of the smoke on the top deck where passengers were gathered was getting unbearable.

The crew decided we should abandon ship to the safety of another one nearby. Inflatable boats were standing by, and 22 passengers were instructed to pass down the two sets of stairs and run the gauntlet of the thick black smoke to get to them. Everyone tried not to panic.

We scurried down the stairs and across the dive deck, where by now visibility was zero, the black smoke was so intense. Luckily we were all familiar with the *Blue Melody's* layout. I took the precaution of holding my breath as I passed through this area, but others were not so foresighted. We jumped without hesitation into the nearest inflatable, and as each filled to capacity, we set off to the next nearest vessel moored at the dive site, the *Miss Nouran*. Many passengers were coughing and several women had broken down in tears. From the *Miss Nouran*, we watched helplessly as our crew and crew members from other boats unselfishly took turns to enter the engine room in an effort to put out the flames, which by now had ignited the timber structure of the vessel. The smoke billowed.

By this time *Blue Horizon*, another vessel from the same fleet as *Blue Melody*, had arrived, and firefighting hoses were passed across as both vessels lay side by side. I noticed that a generator on *Blue Melody* was still running, and its exhaust added white steam to the billowing smoke. We realized that all our possessions

were still aboard our vessel, but we were thoroughly grateful for escaping with our lives. Soon, we were invited to change over to *Blue Horizon*, and as we were ferried over, we found ourselves boarding the vessel alongside three firefighting crew-members, looking very much the worse for wear due to smoke inhalation. One looked beyond help.

"If this had happened at night or a remote dive site, the outcome might have been very different."

Luckily, among the passengers on the many live-boards clustered round the dive site was a resuscitation nurse and a doctor who came aboard with an adrenalin kit. They heroically got the crew-member that had stopped breathing going again. Meanwhile, *Blue Horizon* set off to rendezvous with a high-speed rescue vessel summoned from Sharm el- Sheikh. The

casualties were transferred and we headed back to Sha'ab Ali, where by now the carbon-dioxide fire retardant system in the engine room had done its job and put out the fire. (This system is a one-hit solution to a fire and is only deployed as a last resort.)

Blue Melody was taken in tow, and the two vessels journeyed together back to the port at Hurghada. Next morning, we passengers were invited in small groups to go aboard and, with the aid of flashlights, search for our belongings inside what had now become a soot-blackened hulk. A few things had gone missing, and there was a lot of smoke damage.

Meanwhile, the company found a substitute vessel and made a magnanimous offer of compensation in the form of cash, sent clothes to be laundered, and otherwise tried to mitigate the lost vacation days of its customers. Only four dives had been omitted from the original schedule, and we were soon back diving the wreck of the *Thistlegorm*. The three injured crew members, each suffering from smoke inhalation, were discharged from the hospital the next day.

There's Something Fishy About This Dive Gear

One can find some remarkable claims on the web, so when we discovered this item issued as a press release, we decided to dig a little deeper. If true, it would revolutionize diving.

The Triton Oxygen Respirator claims that it's possible to breathe underwater as if you were a fish. Or so says its inventor, who has created a prototype of a regulator-like device that would make your tank obsolete. "To use scuba equipment, we must learn very complicated procedures, says Jeabyun Yeon, a student at the Samsung Art and Design Institute in Seoul, South Korea. "I've come up with a future product that can solve these difficulties." Or so he says.

The Triton prototype is comprised of a mouthpiece and two appendages that act jointly as the "gills" of the wearer. The user engages the gills simply by biting on the mouthpiece, activating a flow of compressed oxygen extracted from the water as it passes through a filter too fine for water to pass through but will allow smaller molecules, like oxygen, to do so. The filtered oxygen is

compressed into a small micro-compressor powered by a micro battery, and stored in a tank. "The micro battery is a next-generation technology with a size 30 times smaller than current battery that can quickly charge 1,000 times faster," Yeon claims on his website, sans citation (www.behance.net/gallery/13434535/TRITON).

Then there's the issue of science. The blog DeepSeaNews poured gasoline on the Triton, pointing out that to supply one human breath with 35 milligrams of oxygen would mean filtering about 5.92 liters of water, with 100 percent efficiency. So to supply you with enough oxygen for one minute, or normal resting breathing, the Triton would need to pump through 24 gallons of water a minute, without any apparent pump to create that flow of water. Not to mention the fact that there's such a thing as oxygen poisoning, as explained here by How Stuff Works (<http://science.howstuffworks.com/question493.htm>).

And to put another nail in the coffin of the Triton -- breathers like this were not only in one but two James Bond films: *Thunderball* and *Die Another Day*. So movie makers got there first with this fictional concept -- which the Triton will probably continue to be.

On reflection, we had been lucky this incident had happened in the middle of the day, when *Blue Melody* had several other liveboards standing by. Our lifejackets were stored in our cabins, and consequently beyond reach; obviously, they were stored there in the assumption that such an emergency would happen at night. I have always taken the precaution of keeping my essentials in a backpack ready for a quick evacuation should it happen, but again, it was below decks in my cabin.

As it was, we all came away with an anecdote to tell. If it had happened at night or at a remote dive site, the outcome might have been very different. *Blue Melody* did not sink, and is being refitted. Worse things happen at sea.

Next Month: What you should find out about liveboard safety.

John Bantin is the former technical editor of DIVER magazine in the United Kingdom. For 20 years, he used and reviewed virtually every piece of equipment available in the U.K. and the U.S., and made around 300 dives per year for that purpose. He is also a professional underwater photographer, and most recently the author of Amazing Diving Stories, available at www.undercurrent.org

Why Did This Shark Diver Disappear?

did a heart attack, tiger shark or something else get him?

At 8 p.m. on July 13, the U.S. Coast Guard received a distress call about John E. Petty, a 63-year-old diver missing from the *Shear Water*, a liveboard used by Jim Abernethy's Scuba Adventures for its controversial cage-free shark dives in the Bahamas. On the Saturday prior, Petty, a chiropractor from Longview, TX, boarded the boat along with eight other divers and four crew in Palm Beach, FL, for an eight-night expedition to Tiger Beach, 20 miles off Grand Bahama's West End, with the goal of diving with its resident population of tiger sharks. The dive took place in the late afternoon near Memory Rock, and Petty was last seen by another diver in the group during the dive.

Michael Stroschein, manager of Scuba Adventures, told the *Longview News-Journal* that the trip was Petty's first with his company, and that *Shear Water* crew followed emergency procedures when he didn't return to the boat. "John was separated from the boat about 6:30 p.m. on Sunday. We are not really sure why. We do know that there was a current. When the crew realized he was not at the boat, they recalled the divers and initiated the search. Our protocol is 10 minutes. After that, we contacted the Coast Guard and at that point, the Coast Guard takes over."

Operating out of Miami, the Coast Guard deployed an immediate air-and-sea search operation consisting of a cutter, a fixed-wing aircraft, and a helicopter. On Tuesday, the search-and-rescue crews recovered a dive mask. On Wednesday morning, they recovered a camera and some shredded dive gear. All were on the seafloor a nautical mile from where the *Shear Water* called in. On Thursday, after covering 4,600 miles in 64 hours, the Coast Guard called off the search. Petty Officer Jon-Paul Rios of the Coast Guard's Miami station, says that because of the large tiger shark population, a fatal shark encounter could be a possibility.

But Stroschein told *The Tribune* newspaper in the Bahamas he believed Petty was the victim of a drowning. "The evidence does not point to a shark attack in this case. The diver most likely was separated underwater in a current, and we believe he probably ran out of air because of the way the gear was found, and then was disoriented and unable to get back to the boat -- and most likely it is a drowning incident. The most important thing with the dive gear is that the buckles were unbuckled -- a shark can't do that."

Unlike many shark-diving outfits operating out of the Bahamas, Abernethy's Scuba Adventures doesn't use cages, and advertises this trip as only for divers with advanced openwater training. According to *Outside* magazine, Petty received his advanced openwater certification in early July, shortly before he left for the Bahamas. Ken Knezick, owner of the dive travel agency Island Dreams in Houston, had dived with Petty and told the *Longview News-Journal*, "John is an extremely experienced and capable scuba diver."

"Petty might have panicked and drowned, not have found his way back to the group and been lost at sea, or been injured and bled to death. We may never know."

Scuba Adventures runs three or four Bahamas dive expeditions every month, and Abernethy has come under fire in the past for promoting dives with shark species known to pose a threat to humans. We wrote in our April 2008 issue about how Scuba Adventures lost an Austrian diver named Markus Groh to a bull shark that apparently mistook his calf for the baitbox put at the bottom

to attract sharks. Abernethy himself has been bitten. In January 2011, he got a bite to the arm from a reef shark during an excursion to Tiger Beach. According to witnesses, Abernethy was bleeding profusely and needed stitches, but made a recovery and quickly went back to work.

And shark bites may be more than an uncommon occurrence with him, may be happening more frequently than he'd like to admit. A former employee of Scuba Adventures tells *Undercurrent* that Abernethy and one of his boat captains, George Hughes, were each bitten in the hand or arm last summer. Both were treated in the Bahamas, but Abernethy allegedly told others he was spined by a fish he was cleaning. Abernethy didn't respond to questions from *Undercurrent*.

Veteran dive writer and *Undercurrent* contributor John Bantin, who has gone on many shark dives in the Bahamas, says tiger sharks are the garbage collectors of the sea. Describing a dive he did there last summer for the British magazine *Diver*, he writes, "They'll try to eat anything, including underwater cameras, scuba tanks and in this case, evidently, me. One feels strangely detached when a huge tiger shark grabs your tank and swims off with you. It happened to me twice on the same dive, and I had started to think that my luck was running out . . . The shark, nicknamed Emma, now makes a habit of grabbing cameras and swimming off with them. It's a tiger shark's idea of a jolly jape. But my problem was that she took my tank while I was still wearing it. What do you do when a big 15-foot-long stripy fish with teeth grabs you? Well, there's not much you can do."

Regarding Petty's disappearance, Bantin tells *Undercurrent*, "If this dive did happen in the dark, [probably no one] noticed it happen. He might have panicked and drowned, he might have not found his way back to the group and been lost at sea, he might have been injured and bled to death. I fear we'll never know."

Neal Watson, president of the Bahamas Dive Association, is tired of Abernethy bringing bad publicity to Bahamas' sharks. He told *The Tribune* that Petty's disappearance is Scuba Adventures' third mishap in the Bahamas, and that the incident could be due to negligence and incompetence of the Shear Water crew. "This operation has a controversial history and does not operate under the Bahamas Diving Association's shark diving procedures and protocols that have been established to ensure safe interactive shark diving experiences." Shark feeding and shark diving is outlawed in all U.S. waters, so Scuba Adventures, based in Riviera Beach, FL, motors southeast to do cage-free shark dives in the Bahamas.

"The big issue is when you watch the *Today Show* or *Good Morning America*, [or read] the press from around the world, they never said it was a U.S.-registered dive boat that was operating in the Bahamas," says Watson. "They say a scuba diver got killed by a shark attack in the Bahamas. So they pull up their anchor and go back home to South Florida, and we are stuck with the negative publicity of a situation they created through negligence and incompetence."

Protocols for tiger shark diving without a cage include keeping people in a tight, confined area where they can be seen all the time, Watson says. "The crew should have seen what was going on the second it occurred, and been there to assist. You don't just later find out that you are missing somebody -- I think it was negligence on the part of the company." While the Bahamas Diving Association has no control over U.S. dive operators, it's in discussions with the Bahamas government to ensure that they follow that country's official diving procedures.

Undercurrent contributor Bret Gilliam stands up for Abernethy and how Scuba Adventures runs its dives, and divers who sign up for his trips should be aware of all possibilities and accept the outcomes. "Petty made a deliberate, informed decision to dive outside cages with sharks, specifically tigers. These are known potentially dangerous predators and there are obvious risks. It is up to the individual diver to decide if those risks are acceptable. Jim Abernethy has excellent protocols for his operation, provides complete briefings and advice prior to dives, and emphasizes that this activity can incur extreme hazards and risk of attack. Guests must execute a detailed and fully descriptive waiver and release document that lays out all potential risks. There is no question that divers are fully informed and it's up to them to make a conscious intelligent decision to participate."

And if Abernethy follows his own past procedures, he's not going to do anything different. He spoke to *Undercurrent* back in 2009, after Scuba Adventures was cleared of wrongful doing in Markus Groh's death. "The main reason why I haven't changed anything is because sharks don't eat people," he said then. "Sharks do not seek them out, I've never seen a shark being aggressive toward people. He said he looks at sharks the way the Audubon Society looks at birds. "They've been selling bird feeders for years, and birdwatchers feed birds, but every now and then, a bird will bite a person as a mistake. However, feeding the birds is an opportunity for people to get close to these animals so they can see them."

-- Vanessa Richardson

Fish ID Apps for Your Smartphone and Tablet

Reader Nadine Walley (Scottsdale, AZ) asked us, "Where I can buy fish ID apps? I'm hoping there's a Reef ID app for Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach's *Reef Fish Tropical Pacific* and *Reef Creature Tropical Pacific* for my iPad Mini." Fish ID apps are still not so plentiful yet, and Android lags behind Apple in offering them. But here are our favorites and where to find them.

Both Humann/DeLoach books on tropical Pacific reef fish and creatures are available for iPads. They're also available for Androids and iPhones, but one must first download an app made by Blio before you're able to download the e-book. As for computers, Blio only works on Windows, not on Macs. \$30 each. (www.fishid.com/blio.html).

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute has two great -- and free -- iPhone apps. "Fishes: East Pacific" is a guide to shore fishes of the tropical Eastern Pacific Ocean, and was put together by Ross Robertson and Gerald Allen, two expert fish guys. Species can be browsed by common name, Latin name or family (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/fishes-east-pacific-identification/id494644648?mt=8>). There's also "Greater Caribbean Fishes," which covers everything from the typically-seen queen angelfish and spotted drums to Florida's deepwater treasures *Lipogramma regium* and *Plectranthias garrupellus*. Nearly 1,600 species are covered in 5,500 pictures. (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/fishes-greater-caribbean/id570048678?mt=8>)

For Hawaii-loving divers, "Reef Critter Hawaii" shows 374 invertebrate species on an iPhone/iPad, and each image is accompanied by a small description, organized by species and family, and comes with links to external video content. The same app developer makes "Reef Fish Florida and Caribbean," which settles those post-dive discussions about angelfish versus emperorfish with 400 photos and descriptions written by marine experts. It also comes with links to external videos, and options to store your favorites. Each app is \$5 (<http://indigo.malinowski.com>).

Flotsam & Jetsam

Smart Divers Sign Up for This Program. Before he left for a Red Sea liveaboard trip last month, *Undercurrent* reader George Constantino (Anchorage, AK) signed up with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), a free service offered by the U.S. State Department to let Americans traveling abroad inform the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate about details of their trip. The benefits: You get info from the embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, and it can contact you in case of an emergency, whether a natural disaster there or a family emergency back home. "It was comforting to know what was happening in the country before we arrived, and that someone in the State Department knew our travel itinerary," says Constantino. And with more civil strife in global headlines these days, it's wise for travelin' divers to let U.S. authorities know where they're headed overseas. Sign up for STEP at <https://step.state.gov/step>.

Do You Have DON and Don't Know It? One diving malady seldom discussed is dysbaric osteonecrosis (DON), which is caused in divers by a reduction in blood flow due to a nitrogen embolism blocking the blood vessels. This may result in major damage to bone structures in the shoulders and hips -- and if one develops it, the symptoms are so subtle, even invisible, the person often wouldn't know. A recent study examined Japanese divers who visited the hospital between 1981 and 2012 to be evaluated for DON. It was seen most in those who dived to maximum depths of 66 to 95 feet, with average depths between 33 to 62 feet. Doc Vikingo has written a full story about DON; read it at our blog (www.undercurrent.org/blog).

When Lightning Strikes the Water. Southern California got a rare summer thunderstorm last month, and it led to one person dead and seven others hospitalized after a lightning bolt hit the water near the pier at Venice Beach, electrifying it and zapping swimmers

and surfers in the area. While 75 percent of fatalities by lightning strikes in the U.S. are in open fields or near trees, 12 percent happen in or near water, so potentially, lightning is the biggest weather danger for divers. This brings to mind the July 2007 death of diver Stephen Wilson, who died when lightning hit his tank. Despite a severe thunderstorm warning in effect, he went boat diving with friends near Miami. Wilson resurfaced 30 feet from the boat when the lightning bolt struck his tank and knocked him unconscious. He was pronounced dead from electrocution minutes later. So when there's a thunderstorm brewing near the water, think twice before diving.

Seahorses Only Look Cute. They growl when they're angry, says a new study in the *Journal of Zoology*. Researchers from Brazil's Universidade Federal de Pernambuco put a hydrophone in an aquarium tank to record seahorses during feeding, courtship and handling by humans. The seahorses emitted happy-sounding clicks as they fed, and males and females both clicked away during courtship. But when a human held a seahorse near the hydrophone, the equipment picked up a very angry "growl," accompanied by body vibrations. Researchers believe the actions are escape mechanisms to startle predators.

"For a Lobster, a Life." Florida's lobster mini-season got off to a deadly start in Pompano Beach, and it claimed a talented young man with so much potential. Around 8:30 a.m. on July 31, authorities got a call about an unconscious diver named Joseph Grosso who had been lobster diving on a commercial dive boat. The group had just got back into the boat from a dive when Grosso, 22, decided to go back into 40 feet of water alone. The crew realized Grosso had not resurfaced and began searching for him, but he was found unresponsive. After CPR and life support-efforts, Grosso was pronounced dead at the hospital. Just the day before, Grosso, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, had been added to the University of Miami's football roster as a linebacker, and he was planning to start law school. His stepfather, Philip Franchina, wants divers to learn from Grosso's death, saying, "He went down [alone] to get one more lobster and at the end of the day, for a lobster, a life."

Undercurrent is the online consumer newsletter for sport divers that reviews scuba destinations and equipment. We accept no advertising, and have published monthly since 1975.

Letters to the Editor/Submissions
EditorBenD@undercurrent.org

Editorial Staff
Ben Davison, Publisher and Editor
Vanessa Richardson, Senior Editor
Dave Eagleray, Webmaster

Contact Us
Call: 415-289-0501
Go to: www.undercurrent.org/UCnow/contact.shtml
or write:

Undercurrent
3020 Bridgeway
Sausalito, CA 94965

undercurrent

August 2014 Vol. 29, No. 8

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