

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Aqua Safari and Living Underwater, Cozumel

Two different dive operators, two different views

IN THIS ISSUE:

Aqua Safari and Living Underwater, Cozumel.....1

Your Fellow Divers Need Your Reader Reports3

Dehydration and Diving.....4

Could This Diver's Death Have Been Prevented?.....6

Little Cayman, Cocos, Palau...9

They Left Without the Dead Diver's Body11

Murder of Stuart Cove's Dock Manager.....12

Rarest Dive Watch Ever?.....13

Starving Underwater Photographers: Part I.....14

Dive Your Golf Course15

Bubbles Up.....16

Bad Night on the *Wind Dancer* 17

Don't Sign This Lionfish Petition.....18

Flotsam & Jetsam20

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These days, I get many reader queries about two dive destinations in particular -- Raja Ampat and Cozumel. While we periodically cover Raja Ampat, it has been a while since we've written about Cozumel, and because two of our long-time correspondents were heading there just weeks apart, I decided to run stories with contrasting views about two different dive operators. I think this can be extremely helpful for divers who have never visited Cozumel, and for those who have, perhaps our writers will offer you new options. Now, go get wet!

-- Ben Davison

* * * * *

listening for splendid toadfish

Dear Fellow Diver:

One of my favorite fish is Cozumel's endemic splendid toadfish, which I look for under low-ceiling recesses on the sand. The vibrant yellow fin borders and gray-, blue- and white-striped body pop out, making its discovery a real treat. As a repeat diver with Aqua Safari, I was fortunate on this trip to be guided by Mariano, a Yucatan native who has been with Aqua Safari for 20 years. When I asked if he could find me a toadfish, he simply replied, "How many?"

On past trips, I've been lucky to see just one, but this March, I saw more than 20. I asked Mariano how he finds them. "I



Aqua Safari's *Ocean I*



listen," he said. So at the dive site named Dahlia, when he pointed out two along a shallow reef overhang, I, too, listened. Sure enough, I heard croaking, foghorn-like sounds. Then, skimming along the sand, I found eight more splendid toadfish on my own.

While I've made 15 trips to Cozumel, this was the first in three years, and the reef was as vibrant and healthy as it was before devastating Hurricane Wilma in 2005. (Full disclosure: I've made more than 200 paid dives with Aqua Safari, but I can provide an honest evaluation; there are a few warts.) Although the day temperature was in the low 80s, the skies were partly cloudy, but still the colors of sponges and corals were impressive, as were Cozumel's colorful tropical fish. I saw several half-inch juvenile spotted drums as well as huge spiny lobsters. Midnight, queen and rainbow parrotfish scraped algae along the reef, while occasional barracudas sauntered by. One seven-foot nurse shark at Columbia Bricks swam loops around us divers for 10 minutes. At Palancar Caves, among large barrel sponges, I glided through swim-throughs and weaved in, out and around "rooms" surrounded by the towering coral reef. A pair of eagle rays swept by the wall. On most dives, turtles finned along, stopping to munch on sponges while photographers clicked away. Three years ago, I saw lionfish everywhere, but on this trip I saw just two, perhaps a testament to Cozumel dive operators' concerted efforts to eradicate them and to the many restaurants that bake, sauté and fry them. However, I also saw far fewer large groupers than I had on past trips.

While as many as a dozen dive boats might be spread around Columbia and Palancar reefs, rarely did I see other divers. When I did, they were usually grouped behind their leaders, in contrast to our divers, who were in singles and pairs, making their own choices. Once, idiots from another group picked up a conch and tossed it back and forth. Mariano forcefully finned over and signaled them to stop, which they sheepishly did. Their divemaster had never looked back.

The 35-foot Ocean I holds 12 divers and is said to be the first custom-made dive boat on the island; a lot of loving care has kept it going. It's lined with benches, where tanks are set up. On the top deck, there's both shade and a flat surface for sunbathers. There are no railings above, so when it rains, it's so slippery that an unwary passenger could find himself in the drink. The marine head is small and rusty, but clean. The boat's a workhorse, but a slow horse, lumbering along as other boats pass, taking a good hour to get to most sites. That meant leaving Aqua Safari's in-town dock at 8:15 a.m. and returning around 2 p.m. or later made it impossible for me to grab lunch and take the 2:30 afternoon dives.

Ivan, the boatman, ensured that everyone's air was on, handed out cameras (the water bucket was too small to hold many cameras), and helped divers whenever needed. While some divers leapt from the sides, I, after an awkward step over a thin half-foot bulkhead, made a giant stride off the dive platform. Afterwards, Captain Jorge Chale, who kept close track of his divers, carefully backed the boat into position for our pickup. A pull along a floating trail line got us to the metal ladder, an easy climb. I'd pass up my gear and climb aboard, then partake of the



Cozumel's Endemic Splendid Toadfish

Your Fellow Divers Need Your Travel Reports

Our subscribers depend on solid travel reports from our readers, so if you have not submitted a report from your last trip, we hope you can take a few minutes and do it now. You'll not only be helping others, your report will stimulate other subscribers to respond, enhancing our valuable report base as a resource to help you plan your next dive trip.

Also, did you know that you can email others who have made trips to places you're interested in? You can ask questions about obscure things, like airport accommodations between planes, just how good the dive operator's rental equipment was, whether the boat or lodge was noisy at night, and which travel agent the writer used to book the trip. Fill yours out, and read everyone else's at www.undercurrent.org/members/UCnow/RRdirect.php

fresh fruit as we motored to a calm area for our surface interval. Aqua Safari has two other boats, both 38 feet and holding 16 divers; divers are assigned to a boat. They ran all three daily, which was in marked contrast to recent years when few divers came to Cozumel due to the downward economy.

Gustavo, Aqua Safari's new manager of dive operations, joined us for two days of diving. Ever the keen eye, he found about a dozen two-inch pipehorses camouflaged in clumps of drifting algae. Gustavo is easy to talk with, on the quiet side, and ever the observer in and out of the water.

One day, Mariano sent an inexperienced diver who quickly burned air to the surface alone by Mariano for pick-up. Mariano sent up his safety sausage while keeping an eye on him until the boat picked him up. While there was little current, I was still concerned because I know of divers who disappeared in Cozumel because of this practice. Another day, we were joined by Gabriel, an instructor, and a Russian woman he had certified the day before. I learned later that when she saw my fins disappearing into a hole, Gabriel had to stop her from making a dash to pull me out and save me. She didn't know divers did that!

In 81-degree water, my depth ranged from 86 feet (Columbia Bricks and Palancar Caves) to 33 feet on Paso el Cedral. Since there was just slight current, we either drifted slowly or slightly finned along the reef. I've dived every month in Cozumel, and have found milder currents in February and March, stronger ones from October through December. I love the strong currents when I have to hide behind a reef to explore, or simply "fly" with the current. Most fun for me is when they are changeable, but that's when folks can become separated from their groups. I've helped a couple divers, nearly out of air, who couldn't find their group.

Aqua Safari's boats leave from the dock across from the dive shop. They make a stop at the Palace and, on request, may drop off a diver elsewhere on the way home. Aqua Safari is definitely not valet diving, but I chose it because it's the way Cozumel once was, and I'm comfortable there. Divers haul their own gear to the boat, set it up, and rinse and hang it up at the dive shop at the end, though they'll lend a hand if you need it (or even look like you need it). The dive shop could use better ventilation and the floor is slippery, but, well, that's old Cozumel. (Gear storage and drying at Aqua Safari's Palace Hotel-based dive shop are inadequate, I've been told, so divers take their wetsuits back to their rooms' balconies to dry.)

I joined nine other divers and divemaster Walter for a night dive at Paradise Reef. It can get crowded there with divers from other boats, but fortunately, we were the only group. I heard that intense varying foghorn "singing," and found a splendid toadfish out of his hiding spot -- most likely a male eager for companionship. Several snake-like sharptail eels slunk along, and spotted morays were out hunting. We all grouped at the end of the dive, watching the iridescent blue- and green-changing colors of an octopus as it climbed over the reef, searching crevices.

Dehydration and Diving: Facts and Myths

While dehydration increases the risk of DCS, just how and when divers should hydrate is still unresolved. Currently, medical experts stress pre-dive hydration but don't comment much on post-dive hydration. Some scientific papers encourage mild to moderate dehydration prior to diving, saying it helps prevent decompression sickness, while others warn against it. Some dive experts counsel against drinking coffee or other caffeinated drinks, but there is some scientific evidence to the contrary. Claudia Roussos, M.D., an anesthesiologist from Boynton Beach, FL, wrote about hydration and diving for the rebreather-focused blog Add Helium (www.addhelium.com) so that divers could make smarter decisions about how and when to hydrate during their dive day. Here are some important points:

Urine Color. Several studies have suggested using urine color as an indicator for hydration. Pale yellow urine suggests proper hydration, while brownish urine suggests dehydration, with variations along the color scale. While color is not entirely accurate, you can use it to gauge your own level of hydration.

When to Hydrate. Current studies on hydration and diving are contradictory. Ingesting copious amounts of water pre-dive does not appear to be beneficial because it does not correct dehydration in time. Instead, consuming adequate amounts of liquids (other than alcohol) throughout the entire day is recommended.

What Beverages to Drink. Although coffee and other caffeine-containing beverages may exert a mild diuretic effect, they do not appear to cause dehydration. A more recent study of black tea consumers found no difference in hydration compared to water. It appears that people acclimated to drinking caffeinated beverages are resistant to the diuretic effects, but individuals who abstain from caffeine will urinate more once ingesting it.

You can have your coffee, tea or soda while diving, but go light on the booze the night before, and keep an eye on your urine color.

While I usually stay in a room over the Aqua Safari dive shop or at the Barracuda Hotel, this time I hunkered down at the modern Casa Mexicana on the main street, Avenida Rafael Melgar Sur. My room with small balcony overlooking the city was very clean, with a comfortable queen bed, small fridge and a safe. The bathroom's updated fixtures gleamed and the strong shower had plenty of hot water. A complimentary buffet breakfast, with waffles, made-to-order omelets and lots of fresh fruit topped it off.

For other meals, I liked foraging the fine local Yucatan establishments off the main streets, such as Las Flamitas on Avenida 25 (queso relleno), Conchita del Caribe on 65 Avenida Sur (ceviche and fried fish), and around the corner from Aqua Safari, Casta Brava (sopa de lima for lunch), and US\$1 beers from a barrel on the sidewalk. Three-course dinners, off the main drag, can be found from \$3 to \$10, with chelada con sol (beer with lime juice) for a couple bucks. In celebration of my dive buddy's fiftieth year of diving, we went to Guido's, on Avenida Melgar Sur, for their fantastic wood oven-baked garlic pita bread plus entrees. With wine and a margarita, the bill was \$100.

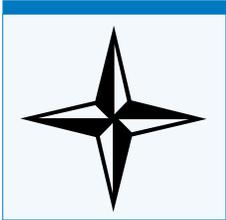
Cruise ship refugees still clog the main street, and some ruin the ambience with drunken rude behavior. But when the ships' whistles sounded and they headed back, I could almost hear the sigh of relief as shop owners took a late siesta. (The entire plaza is blocked off, undergoing major upgrading.)

I should note that after nearly 50 years in the Cozumel dive business with Aqua Safari, Bill Horn sold his dive operation to the Cozumel Palace a while back. (He still maintains his shop and its accommodations as well as "Condomels" north of town.) I heard complaints from divers about problems resulting from the transition -- delayed boat departures, difficulty making reservations, inadequate drying space, bad lockers at the Palace, etc. -- but Gustavo Vazquez, a well-respected island conservationist and long-time Aqua Safari divemaster, became manager this spring. Happily, many of the divemasters are still with Aqua Safari, as are instructors such as Gabriel. I'm already looking forward to another trip, but longer next time. Prior to the sale to the Palace, Aqua Safari had a fast-boat,

owned by its previous manager, Donna, that left at 8 a.m., but Donna provides her own dive trips with it now.

-- J.D.

Our undercover diver's bio: J. Diver, our undercover reviewer, says, "I began diving 12 years ago, quickly becoming obsessed observing fish and critter behavior. A thousand dives later, with plenty of time to burn, I've made half my dives in the Caribbean and the remainder mostly in Indonesia, Philippines, Japan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Turkey. Using the excuse of absorbing local culture, I've drunk kava in Fiji, penis soup in PNG, tiger penis sake in Yonaguni, Japan, and enjoyed betel-nut chewing and spitting in Palau. I'm convinced it helped my fish ID skills in those regions. I'm too absorbed watching fishes to fiddle with a camera."



Divers Compass: My dive package for three days' diving with Aqua Safari and five nights at Casa Mexicana cost me \$695; I paid for two more dives (\$79) and a night dive (\$37) . . . I had to overnight in Houston because of a too-tight flight connection of just 30 minutes -- first time that's happened in going to Cozumel . . . I walked the back streets alone at night, depending upon my dining choices, and never had a worry; locals tell me they're harassed much more than tourists . . . Since banks are only open when I am diving, I exchanged \$100 at the airport

and used US currency, which is accepted everywhere, the rest of the time . . . There is plenty for non-divers to do: snorkeling the Chankanaab reef, ferrying to Playa del Carmen for the day, horseback riding in the jungle and exploring the town . . . Websites: Aqua Safari - www.aquasafari.com; Casa Mexicana - www.casamexicanacozumel.com

* * * * *

attention for newbies, freedom for us

Dear Fellow Diver:

Huge, barnacled, and gray, a leatherback turtle, an avatar of Earth's reptilian past, swam in from the blue. As it came within six feet of me, I could see the saucer-sized scales on its head and almost feel its gaze as it moved on through the canyons at Horse Shoe. My buddy and I were with Jeremy Anschel of Living Underwater, part of a group of seven divers on the first of two morning dives. The turtle was our only big encounter, though an unusual one, that week in early April. On previous trips, I had seen nurse sharks, a pod of dolphins and lots of eagle rays at Eagle Ray Wall, but the bigger animals were not here this trip. However, Jeremy, who excels at finding macro life, discovered a camouflaged pygmy pipehorse on the top of Santa Rosa Wall and a swimming pygmy seahorse at Tormento. For divers of a certain age, a magnifying glass is essential to see the critters clearly.

Jeremy began each day with the same question, "Where do you want to dive today?" Someone would toss out an answer and after a little back and forth, off we would go. However, the day before divers depart, Jeremy lets them pick a destination for a dive. When none of the other guests had a request, I piped up: "How about the Arches at Maracaibo Deep?" Maracaibo is the southernmost site on Cozumel, where the current usually flows north at a good clip. Entry to the curved swim-throughs is at 100



Living Underwater's Jew Fish

feet, so divers need to get down quickly to the fore reef at 90 feet if they're to make it through the arches. Tough dive for the inexperienced, but I love it.

Next day, the sky was clear and the water in front of my hotel, the Intercontinental Presidente, was flat. Jeremy picked up my buddy and me at 8:30 a.m. We boarded his covered panga, the *Jew Fish*, and found our gear already set up on steel 120-cubic-foot tanks with Nitrox 32. The nitrox is analyzed at the filling station, but since I wanted to check my own mix, Jeremy brought an analyzer. The twin Yamaha 150s zipped us past boats that had departed earlier, and soon we passed the popular (read "crowded") sites. The farther south we went, the bumpier the ride. Ricardo drove the boat and

Could This Diver's Death Have Been Prevented?

Melanie Stoddart from Manchester, England, was on an April dive trip in the Maldives and collapsed while diving off Vaavu Atoll, but because there was no immediate transport to the hospital, she died less than 12 hours later without being treated for decompression sickness.

Stoddard, 38, had booked the trip on the *MV Sea Spirit* through the British agency Scuba Tours Worldwide, and she had Divers Alert Network Europe as her insurer for dive medical emergencies. On April 3, on a dive at Vaavu Atoll, she "collapsed," according to the *Daily Express* newspaper. She was given oxygen and taken to the Alimatha Aquatic Resort, where a doctor said she needed to be transferred to a decompression chamber. But there was no transport available until, after a call to DAN Europe, Scuba Tours Worldwide sent for a speedboat from Bandos Island, more than 40 miles away. Stoddard reached the island at 8:20 p.m., and a doctor sedated her but she was not stable enough to be placed in a chamber. She was transferred again by boat six miles to the hospital in the Maldives capital of Male, where her head and chest were scanned. She died at 2:45 a.m. Tests found brain damage caused by nitrogen bubbles in her bloodstream, and during the inquest into her death in England, a pathologist testified that everything pointed to her having DCS. In his verdict, coroner Paul McCandless wrote, "It is possible if her condition had been diagnosed sooner that she would not have died when she did."

Would Stoddard have lived if the *Sea Spirit* and the other Maldives travel operators had acted faster to get her to a chamber? Or can this be chalked up to the death of a diver who just happened to get into trouble at a very remote dive site? It was the latter, according to Sandro Marroni, president of DAN Europe. He told *Undercurrent* the case was handled properly and quickly. "The dive tour operator immediately organized speedboat evacuation with no delay, but clearly the time to reach the patient needed to be taken into account. Stoddard was at the chamber four hours after surfacing. We were involved when we were informed about the above (we did not have to do anything, as everything had been done properly, and we were limited to providing insurance guarantee of payment and followup).

"It was a tragic case, but I can hardly see that anyone could be blamed. It was one of those catastrophic cases where DCS can be a cause, but cardiac or pulmonary causes are also very likely. Symptom onset was immediate -- 10 minutes after surfacing -- and very, very serious (no clear focal cerebral sign, but shock-like cardio-pulmonary involvement)."

Petar DeNoble, vice president of mission for DAN North America, says Stoddard's nine-hour delay for treatment is actually less than the average delay in recreational diving injuries. "Given the remoteness of the accident site and the late-afternoon time when it happened, one cannot expect anything much better. We have this issue with dive injuries in many other remote sites."

Divers traveling overseas should keep in mind that if it takes several hours to get to your destination from a sizeable city with good medical facilities, it will usually take more time to get you out. "To organize an emergency evacuation takes hours, and depends on the time of day and local weather," DeNoble says. "Nobody should bet their safety on local emergency services. The Maldives cover a huge area, and it is impossible to have stand-by coverage for every part of it. We suggest that dive boats be self-sustained for the first 24 hours of an injury. Unfortunately, for most severe injuries, only top trauma centers can provide proper treatment and possibly save the diver's life. Divers should mitigate their risk of DCS with additional precautions. Older divers and divers with health issues should avoid travelling into remote areas that lack medical facilities they may need. That all said, people still have the right to accept risks and enjoy the diving life."

Pato, so called "because he walks like a duck," handled the gear, snacks and other needs. By the way, I should note that the boat's name is Jeremy's own joke, as one of my fellow writers reported three years ago. When he told Jeremy, who is Jewish, that it had been more than a decade since scientists renamed the jewfish "the Goliath grouper," Jeremy replied, "Not in Cozumel."

At Maracaibo, we arrived in five-foot swells, with not another dive boat in sight. Two fishing boats trolled in the distance. I asked Jeremy, "Do those guys monitor marine radio?" They did. My buddy and I each carried Nautilus radios set to channel 6, the emergency radio frequency. Chatter between the boats is on channel 16, also used by taxis, so it was comforting to know that if we were adrift, we could at least call a cab. We also carried DAN surface safety kits consisting of surface marker buoy, glow stick and surface signaling mirror, buddy lines and spare mirrors. (You can never anticipate an emergency, just plan for one, so we carry this kit wherever we dive.) While Cozumel has plenty of dives for less-experienced divers, this wasn't one of them. Jeremy judges each diver's abilities before he takes them to advanced sites like Barracuda and Maracaibo. Of course, newbies eventually need to learn to dive in the "sub-marine wind," as I like to call it, so Jeremy tries to show them how. This day two other divers, Canadians, were aboard -- an avid underwater hockey player and his less experienced buddy.

After Jeremy jumped in to check the current -- it was indeed flowing north -- Ricardo gave us a 1-2-3 count and we all backrolled into the chop. My buddy and I kicked down to 90 feet as fast as our ears would allow. Looking up, I saw the other team sinking too slowly and because we were expected to be diving as a group, the current pushed us past the Arches' entry point. So we spent the rest of the dive on the slope above the wall where the features were unremarkable and the critters generally ho-hum. Because it was the Canadians' last day, they had asked for a wreck dive. So after a two hour surface-interval at the scruffy Palancar Beach Club, sitting under the thatched palapas, shopping for T-shirts and trying to feed a curious coati, we headed back out, this time dropping down on the C-53 wreck, a decommissioned mine sweeper sitting upright on a sand bottom in 82 feet. It's been set up for limited penetration, with holes cut in the hull and lines attached here and there. In the cramped passageways and compartments leading to the engine room, a line of divers is sure to stir up rust. Glassy sweepers filled one of the compartments, a huge clinging crab hid beneath a metal box and a few grunts hung out. However, the fun is in navigating the tight compartments. As we ended the diving hanging from a line, I watched as the Atlantis submarine motored by in the distance, while a school of horse-eye jacks watched me. I didn't like getting back to the hotel at 2 p.m. from two

Aqua Safari/Casa Mexicana

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

Living Underwater/Presidente Resort

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

Caribbean Scale

dives, so I asked if we could shorten the surface intervals, and for the next two days, Jeremy obliged.

When you only have one boat, you need to take business as it comes, which means experienced divers may not always be with others, though Jeremy does well accommodating those of us who can handle ourselves -- which is why I return to dive with him. Next day, we picked up two folks who had ferried from Playa del Carmen just for the day. They had a made few dives in the British Virgin Islands and rented all their gear from Jeremy. He announced we were going to Palancar Gardens, and I assured the other couple it was a nice dive, they would be fine and they would have no trouble getting down, especially with the 16 pounds of lead they were wearing. For the 81-degree water, I was wearing a 3-mil vest under a full-length 3-mil wetsuit; with steel tanks, I only needed six pounds of lead.

Jeremy uses an aquarium net to trap lionfish, then crushes their skulls between thumb and forefinger.

We dropped to the sandy fore-reef, while Jeremy patiently worked the divers through mask and buoyancy problems. Paddling around the top of the wall, I checked out azure sponges and a few lobsters. I saw Jeremy trying to get the husband to stop flailing his arms about and floating up, so my buddy and I paddled some more. I saw Jeremy demonstrating his meditative pose, prone on the sand breathing slowly, but the two divers were anything but Zen-like. So we paddled

some more. At 18 minutes, we gave up paddling, waved goodbye, headed down and finned through a descending tunnel covered in orange rope sponges, and emerged on a spectacular wall of cuts, buttresses and overhangs. At 92 feet, I cruised past enormous barrel sponges and poked my light into crevices, finding lobsters, queen angels, schools of mahogany snappers and blue striped grunts. I watched for the bubbles on top of the reef to keep Jeremy more or less within view in the 100-foot-plus visibility. When I rejoined them, the newbies had burned their air. Jeremy put up his safety sausage, led them to the boat, watched them ascend and then the three of us continued for another 15 minutes. We saw fewer lionfish than on our previous trips, maybe due to the collection tournaments held every year. Jeremy uses an aquarium net to trap them, then crushes their skulls between thumb and forefinger. When I asked him if he ever got stung, he said, "Oh yeah, all the time."

The Intercontinental Presidente is pricey and probably worth it, but only just. This was our third spring-break trip in three years, and after previously complaining about the uneven service (it takes endless phone calls to get anything delivered), we received a discount on our beachfront room. While it was a busy Easter week (sometimes after returning from a dive, the room was still not cleaned), the beach, the view and the friendly restaurant staff made up for minor problems. Because the El Presidente is not all-inclusive with booze, the rowdyism found at other hotels is absent. We enjoyed lunches at one of the couches in the open-air restaurant, gazing at the sea. By dinnertime, the kiddie action at the main pool was over, quiet reigned and the happy hour drinks were two-fers with complimentary chips or nuts. We ate at their steakhouse, the Napa Grill. My partner's New York strip was perfectly cooked, and the Béarnaise sauce on my filet was excellent. Pair that with dessert, a bottle of Washington State pinot noir and tip, and we were out about \$200.

The rest of the time, we took the \$9 cab ride into town, where we ate well at Kondesa with its Mex-fusion grub (lionfish appetizers), bespoke cocktails and brilliant service. At Casa Denis, just off the plaza, we had excellent seafood and fajitas while being entertained by fire jugglers and other street acts. At the Bahia del Caribe, at the fishermen's cooperative on Avenida 5, we had several lionfish courses, where there was no problem with lionfish supply. At lunch, Cha Cha's Kitchen serves only a soup and two dishes -- that's it. We had Korean

barbecue tacos and a vegan version of the same dish. In addition, a new restaurant called The Restaurant Dracula -- weird for Cozumel, or anywhere, for that matter -- offered Romanian-Mexican fusion lunches. We didn't ask what was on the menu after sunset.

-- D.L.

Our undercover diver's bio: D.L. got his openwater certification in New York in 1987, having failed a resort course in Jamaica due to a misunderstanding about the local flora. He added C-cards in advanced openwater, rescue, oxygen management, EANx and Advanced EANx, while traveling to the Caribbean, Mexico, Egypt, Hawaii, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Bikini Atoll and Fiji, where he had his appendix out after a memorable 12-hour trip from Taveuni to Nadi on New Year's Day 1988. He has dived the 200-foot-deep Windjammer wreck in Bonaire on air six times, earning him the nickname "Old Twitchy."



Divers Compass: Living Underwater charges \$465 for five two-tank dives, nitrox will run you \$12 a tank, Sherwood computers are \$15 per day and it's another \$45 for a BC, wetsuit, fins, mask and Sherwood regulator; Jeremy will rinse and store your gear overnight, and have it waiting for you on the boat the next day . . . Fruit, baked snacks and water are served between dives, and you will love the fleece rain jackets . . . Ocean-view rooms at the Intercontinental Presidente are as little as \$296 plus fees in the low season; windows in rooms 5101-5139

and 5201-5239 frame the palm-shrouded beach and blue water . . . Websites: Living Underwater - www.living-underwater.com; Intercontinental Presidente - www.ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/gb/en/cozumel/czmha/hoteldetail

Little Cayman, Cocos, Palau, PNG . . .

great liveaboard picks, and a sailfish slaughter in Guam

If the summer-vacation bug is starting to bite you, here are a few suggestions for places to consider for your next dive trips, based on other *Undercurrent* readers' reports.

Condos on Little Cayman. While my favorite resort in Little Cayman has forever been Pirates Point (it's celebrating its 30th anniversary this year), many divers prefer condos, so I'll call your attention to the privacy of the oceanfront Paradise Villas, where you can gaze at the ocean, cook in, or eat next door at the Hungry Iguana restaurant (or walk to Pirates Point). Michael T. Hynan (Grafton, WI) says, "My wife and I made our 11th trip to Little Cayman in April, staying at Paradise Villas. Conch Club Divers owner Bill runs a solid operation. I turned 68 and told Bill, who just turned 70, that I appreciated diving with an older captain/divemaster, as I knew I would not get discriminated against for my age. Paradise Villas was topnotch as always, with Marc and Sabine doing their best for all customers. Units have new air-conditioning systems, beds had new frames with headboards, and new large dressers were a plus. Food and service at the Hungry Iguana restaurant continue to be very good." A week with six days of diving runs in the neighborhood of \$1,500 per person, double occupancy. (www.paradisevillas.com; www.conchclubdivers.com)

Another Little Cayman condo option is the Conch Club. Stephen Anania (Hopewell Junction, NY), there last November, says, "Accommodations were spacious in the two-bedroom, two-bath condos. The living room, kitchen, dining area and two bathroom are downstairs, and the two bedrooms upstairs. [Note from Ben: hmm, maybe a nighttime problem for aging bladders.] There is only one grocery store on the island, about a 20-minute walk." (www.conchclubcondos.com)

Sea Hunter, Cocos Island. When we reported on a special deal for Costa Rica's *Sea Hunter* (20 percent off), Ed Leibowitz (Jersey City, NJ) jumped on it for an April trip to Cocos Island. "Jenny Collister of the travel agency Reef and Rainforest did an excellent job putting this trip together. The *Sea Hunter* is a luxurious boat. Although I've been diving for 34 years, I do not consider myself that good a diver. I usually take one dive vacation per year. However, all worked out well. I'm 72 years old and was the oldest diver. Gloves are necessary to hold onto the rocks in strong currents. I saw many white-tip sharks (particularly on the two night dives) and two large hammerheads. I saw eagle and marbled rays on most dives, and an occasional turtle and blackjacks. Most dives were deep, and it is easy to get into deco mode even with nitrox at 32 percent -- you have to watch your computer. It was a great trip." Ten-day trips run about \$5,500. (www.underseahunter.com)

"If a dive crew prefers to slaughter a sailfish rather than take divers down to admire its beauty, there's something seriously wrong with this operator's mentality."

Sailfish Slaughter in Guam. Gopal Krishnan (Mumbai, India) reports that on the way to dive Chuuk in March, his group got stuck in Guam because of Typhoon Masak and never made it to Chuuk (but trip insurance covered nearly all his cost). To kill time in Guam, he dived with MDA. "Their boat is small and cramped, and they charged \$125 for two dives. The crew caught a sailfish that was reeled in near the dive jump-off area at the rear,

then they battered it with lead weights and killed it brutally! We were speechless at this barbaric act, and when we voiced our disgust, it was too late to save the fish. They made a lame apology. The blood and gore was hosed off. If the dive crew prefers to slaughter a sailfish rather than take divers down to admire its beauty, then there is something seriously wrong with this operator's mentality. I stopped diving with them, although I still had a few days in Guam. PADI needs to pull up such operators as it goes against the basic principles of diving which all of us so passionately love."

Muck Diving in Indonesia. Shooting weird little critters is what photographers want to do these days, and Lyn Phillips (Fallbrook, CA) says there isn't a much better place to do that than Maluku Dive Resort in Ambon, Indonesia. There in May, she says, "You can find every critter on your list: wonderpus, blue-ringed octopus, frogfish, ghost pipefish, harlequin shrimp, bumblebee shrimp, lots of weird crabs and, of course, nudibranchs. We saw over 90 species. There are about 10 large rooms, mostly separate bungalows that look over the gardens and ocean from a covered porch. High ceilings, ceiling fan, AC, big bathroom, two large desk areas, coffee-making facilities and electrical outlets. Food is OK. The dive area has bins for gear and covered drying areas for wetsuits. The camera room is conveniently located and spacious. Three scheduled dives a day with optional night dives. Most dives were 80 to 90 minutes. Some of the dive sites are under big, docked fishing boats with a lot of garbage, but have many strange critters and swirling schools of small fish. Overall, this is an excellent resort." A week with 18 dives runs around \$1,700 per person. (www.muckdivingindonesia.com)

FeBrina, Papua New Guinea. I've found astonishing diving in the waters of Papua New Guinea, and the venerable *FeBrina*, run by the even more venerable Alan Raabe, continues to please divers. Gloria Freund (McLean, VA), who returned in May from her second trip there, says, "These reefs and the sole dive boat that troubles to ply them were as good as ever, and remain among the best of several liveboards and diving hot spots I've experienced. *FeBrina's* five-dive-per-day schedule has you in the water at optimal times for ambient light and reef activity. We enjoyed daily the visual poetry of God's rays dancing across large shoals of barracuda and snappers above huge sea fans, thick stands of red whip corals, gargantuan barrel and elephant ear sponges and hard coral gardens. Shark attractant provided plenty of chances for close encounters. Bumpheads, tuna and plenty of spotted sweetlips cruising around . . . *FeBrina* is neither the largest, nor frankly, the most luxurious liveboard, but it remains in excellent repair and lacked for nothing. Rooms, though small, provided for comfortable sleep, food was tasty and plentiful, dinner wine pours were

generous, and diving off the main boat was very manageable. An entertaining, albeit sometimes salty raconteur, Alan Raabe knows these reefs like his own backyard. Judging by the abject dearth of other PNG liveboards, few possess Alan's patience, persistence and dedication to making it work. If you want to see the pristine richness of this place, this is your option. Josie and Digger, two PNGers who have sailed with this boat for a long time, were master treasure-finders on every dive. With around 800 dives, I am moderately experienced, and I would have missed 90 percent of what they revealed." Ten-day trips run from \$3,500 to \$4,600. (www.walindi.com)

Repositioning Cruises on the *Mermaids*. Twice a year, the *Mermaid I* and *II* make a 15-day biodiversity cruise, reports Harvey S. Cohen (Middletown, NJ), to reposition between Raja Ampat and Bali, and this 1,500-mile journey travels through the Spice Islands with about 45 dives. (True believers can continue from Maumere to Bali for another week.) "The dive sites include all the natural diversity of the Coral Triangle -- walls, bommies muck -- and offer a wealth of big pelagics, macro, hard and soft corals. No wrecks. The rooms, food, and service are resort-standard, and the dive operation is superbly

"They Confirmed He was Dead, Then Left . . . Without the Body"

The number of diver deaths in the Cayman Islands so far in 2015 is eight, but it's a March 31 fatality, a 62-year-old tourist from Northport, AL, causing the most controversy after a local dive boat operator claimed the authorities mistreated the man's body.

Victor Crawford was doing a morning dive off Lover's Wall in the East End with a group of 18 when no one could locate him after they surfaced. They radioed for help and a boat from the Ocean Frontiers dive shop responded. Crawford was later found in the water, and Ocean Frontiers' boat staff took him to their dock for treatment. The controversy started after Royal Cayman Islands Police Service (RCIPS) told the *Cayman News Service* that Crawford was taken to a nearby hospital, where he was officially pronounced dead. However, Ocean Frontiers managing director, Stephen Broadbelt, wrote a reply, stating he was "shocked" with RCIPS' response. "The ambulance took over one hour to arrive, and even after 911 was called, they called back to ask if we were sure and did we really need an ambulance. To make matters worse, after the paramedics had assessed the body, they confirmed he was dead, got back in the ambulance and left, without the body."

After Broadbelt's comments, RCIPS changed its story, confirming Broadbelt's claim that the ambulance left the scene without Crawford's body, but a spokesperson said the ambulance was called at noon, arrived at 12:42 p.m., and then was dispatched while uniformed police stayed until an undertaker arrived. The RCIPS maintains that it wasn't negligent and that allegations of mistreatment are causing distress to Crawford's family.

The number of deaths has Cayman dive operators defending their islands, insisting it's a safe place to dive. Nick Buckley, founder of Deep Blue Divers, told the *Cayman Reporter*, "If you take the number of divers who come to Cayman, multiply that by the number of dives they make, and then do it as a percentage, you'll see that [diving fatalities are] absolutely miniscule."

Cayman dive instructors named heart attack as the number one cause of death during diving, and Buckley says that despite asking a lot of medical questions of divers on the release forms, some people don't tell the whole truth. "If they are found out, they can get very defensive and angry, as if you have ruined their holiday. They don't understand the position they put themselves and their family in, as well as any potential incidents that would affect our business."

Another issue for dive operators is the vague use of the term "dive accident." Keith Sahn, general manager of Sunset Divers, told the *Cayman Reporter*, "If a person has a heart attack on a golf course, he had a heart attack; he didn't have a golf-related accident . . . but if somebody has a heart attack while scuba diving or snorkeling, all of a sudden it's a diving accident. We have had 400,000 more visitors this year than we had last year . . . so quite frankly, just on the regular percentages alone, you're going to have more jet ski accidents, more snorkeling deaths, and more scuba-related deaths."

run. The boat is a steel-hull twin-engine, which seems an excellent thing for remote waters. Because the cruise involves several open-water crossings (mostly at night), it can be a bit rough; at times the boat would roll hard for several hours while under way. Diving is from Zodiacs, with three or four guests to one guide. Divers could stick with the guide, a buddy, or go solo. The crew will do everything for you if you let them -- carry gear, rinse and hang wetsuits, etc. Almost all divers doff their tanks and fins in the water, and let the driver haul the gear into the Zodiac. Back at the boat, the crew takes all gear from the Zodiac and gets it ready for the next dive." The price is \$4,300 to \$5,400, depending upon cruise and accommodations. (www.mermaid-liveboards.com)

Siren's New Truk Liveboard. Typhoon Masak raised hell on Chuuk, washing the *Siren* up on the reef, after which looters set fire to it. But the *Siren's* owner, Frank Van der Linde, didn't waste much time in getting a new liveboard to take its place. He just announced the *Truk Master*, a steel yacht, will start sailing there in February. "She has been used for many years as a private luxury boat, and while Truk wasn't the original plan, we know she will be perfect there," Van der Linde stated in the press release. (www.sirenfleet.com/diving/truk-lagoon.html)

That's it for this month. Coming up: Indonesia and Socorro Island liveboards, resorts in the Grenadines (right by Petit Mustique, but this time for real) with easy and pleasant diving, and a few surprises.

-- Ben Davison

Brutal Murder of Stuart Cove's Dock Manager

Bahamas' crime rate is far higher than NYC or Chicago

The 48th murder in the Bahamas so far this year happened on May 1. At 10:00 that night, four men broke into the marina on western New Providence Island, where Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas boats are moored. Two men tied up the security guard, while another two went down the dock and boarded the sloop Lucky Break, home to Gary Vanhoeck, Stuart Cove's operations manager, and his wife Kathryn.

Vanhoeck, 51, was relaxing aboard and Kathryn, 43, was asleep in the cabin when the men boarded. They demanded that Vanhoeck give them money and ordered him onto the dock, where they shot him twice. Woken by the gunshots, Kathryn scrambled to the deck, where one of the gunmen confronted her. In shock, she ran past him to a friend's house down the road. Only when they returned with police did Kathryn learn that her husband was dead.

Vanhoeck, originally from Grimsby, England, quit his job in the U.K. to pursue his dream of becoming a dive instructor. He and Kathryn set off from Britain five years ago in the Lucky Break to pursue that dream. One day, they sailed into the dock where Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas is based, and Gary landed the job of dock manager, says *Undercurrent* contributor John Bantin, who knew the Vanhoecks from his frequent Bahamas dive trips. "The two Brits, both hard-working ordinary folk, fit in well, with that British "cool" for coping with inevitable dive-center operating problems without turning them into a crisis." Bantin wrote a tribute to Vanhoeck, which we posted as our latest blog post -- read the rest of it at www.undercurrent.org/blog.

Bahamas police launched an island-wide manhunt for four suspects, but no one has been arrested yet. Nassau police spokesman Stephen Dean told the *Daily Mail*, "The men wanted money, and it's not clear if he [Vanhoeck] resisted or if there was a struggle. He was shot dead and they ran off." Dean said that a killing like this was "rare" and "not an everyday occurrence."

The Rarest Dive Watch Ever?

In an *Undercurrent* article three years ago, we pooohooed the idea of buying a dive watch when dive computers have more features and are way less expensive. However, we did advise that if you have an old dive watch lying around, you should consider selling it. They're more commonly being appreciated as valuable collectibles, and watch collectors, whether scuba divers or not, are shelling out more money for them.

Take this Breguet diver's watch that hit the auction block at Christies last month. According to Luke Rottman, executive editor of the Watch Adviser blog, 20th century Breguet wristwatches are the rarest watches on earth. In 1962, Breguet produced roughly 60 dive

watches, all with varying dials. "Hence, this [watch] with an Arabic dial, to the best of my knowledge, is likely piece-unique," says Rottman. It's similar to "tool watches" (those designed for specific purposes, like diving or flying) of the 1950s, such as the Rolex 6536 Submariner and the Blancpain Fifty Fathoms, but not that innovative compared to larger dive watches that Blancpain, Omega, Eberhard, and Rolex were already beginning to produce. But according to Rottman, it's all about the aesthetics.

Christie originally estimated this Breguet's value as between \$32,000 and \$65,000. Rottman sniffed, saying that wasn't the least bit generous. "If anything, this watch will fetch a considerably higher dollar amount than what Christie's anticipates." And he was right -- the world's rarest dive watch ultimately sold for \$100,866. So if you have an old dive watch, get thee to a jewelry appraiser post haste.

It may not be an everyday occurrence, but serious crime in the Bahamas happens far too frequently. The murder rate in the Bahamas in 2013 was 34.1 murders for every 100,000 people. Compare that to four murders for every 100,000 people in New York City and 15.2 for Chicago. The Bahamas's population is 377,000, one-seventh the size of Chicago's, but its murder rate is more than double that of the Windy City. The Bahamas police stopped releasing crime statistics last year.

According to the Bahamas newspaper *Tribune 242*, Vanhoeck's murder was the 48th homicide in the Bahamas this year. Brutal home invasions are a regular occurrence. In April, Geoffrey Harding, a retired doctor from British Columbia, was stabbed to death during a home-invasion robbery in Clarence Town, Long Island. The police arrested a 43-year-old Bahamian a few days later, but refused to disclose that Harding was Canadian, in its police report. The newspapers also downplayed the murder, with the *Tribune* describing Harding merely as a "Caucasian man," and the *Nassau Guardian* not reporting it all. Those are all moves that the Bahamas Tourism Bureau loves.

In the last 15 months, the U.S. has issued six critical crime warnings for the Bahamas, most recently in February, warning tourists of armed robbery, kidnapping, and sexual assault. Maritime lawyer Jim Walker, who writes the blog *Cruise Law News*, listed Nassau as the world's most dangerous cruise destination. Hard to believe that the lovely Bahamas, so close to the U.S. mainland, is near the top of the global list for crime advisories. That makes it sound more like Papua New Guinea, with its capital of Port Moresby infamous for brutal crimes (read our March 2009 travel feature about Papua New Guinea and you'll see that it starts off with our writer ducking for cover from gunshots ringing out in the airport's domestic terminal). Besides the Bahamas, other Caribbean destinations where crime is a concern include the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Honduras mainland. Robert Curley, the Caribbean travel writer for About.com, says that statistics show the safest Caribbean dive destinations are the Caymans, the British Virgin Islands and Bonaire.

While travelers need be cautious, one should not be timid and fail to explore interesting attractions in the daytime. Even in the most troubled places, violent crime rarely touches tourists. Thugs are usually targeting dangling purses, Rolex watches, and expensive cameras. Exercise normal caution and enjoy your trip.

- - Vanessa Richardson

(A note from Ben: Well, sometimes thugs are looking for other things. Years ago, after a liveaboard trip in Papua New Guinea waters, I stayed at Ambua Lodge in the highlands. A guest went for a

morning stroll and returned, shaking like a leaf. A bow-and-arrow-toting tribesman had held him up and took his prescription glasses -- but not his \$2,000 camera. That's PNG.)

Starving Underwater Photographers: Part I

pity the pro, or pat the amateur on the back?

Here's a funny-but-somewhat-depressing episode that can summarize the state of commercial underwater photography today for those who work very hard at their craft. The Lundy Island Splash-In is an annual underwater photography competition held at Lundy Island, a marine reserve off England's Devon Coast. It's a prestigious contest, with prizes provided by dive gear companies like Mares, Suunto, and Sea & Sea. The winner last year was a diver who had just learned the basics of photography the day before. Jo Crewsdon, 42, told the *Western Morning News*, "Once I was underwater, I was playing about with the camera's settings when a seal came along and began swimming around my buddy and me. We had some great interaction and I just kept shooting away and got the right shot." Her close-up of a gray seal placed first in two of four categories.

Serious photographers losing out to a novice such as Crewsdon is now commonplace. They're routinely being beat by amateurs in getting photos printed in magazines and ad campaigns. And while professional photographers may have once been able to earn a living and sell photos regularly for big money because there were few quality photos (the cost of film priced ordinary folks out), along came their two worst enemies: the Internet and the digital camera. Film went out of style, camera prices dropped and well-heeled divers spent more time traveling and photographing. The price paid for photos dropped, and today almost anyone can get one great shot on a trip, and if they post it online, it can be located and purchased for pittance -- or as a freebie.

Many divers developed skills with the idea of becoming a professional photographer, working freelance or hoping to be on staff, like David Doubilet for *National Geographic*. That career path has changed as drastically as the market for their work has. So, pity the pro, or pat the amateur on the back? We contacted some top professional photographers to see how they're doing these days, and how they're changing with the times.

Were Those Really the Days?

British photographer Martin Edge (www.edgeunderwaterphotography.com) remembers his first commission 30 years ago, a simple close-up of a diver facing the camera at 25 feet off the coast of Portland, England. "It was an urgent request for the first cover of a new outdoors magazine. I was astonished when a check for £500 (about US\$650) came through the mailbox. A lot of money back then. As my skills and confidence developed, I frequently did underwater articles, images and other front cover photos for which, in my opinion, I was paid well." In 1988, Edge started teaching underwater photography to beginners and two years later was running workshops on liveaboards. In 1995, he published *The Underwater Photographer*, which is now in its fourth edition (we offer it for sale on our website -- scroll down the page at www.undercurrent.org/UCnow/bookpicks.shtml). Now Edge adds to his income with speakers' fees, a monthly column in the British magazine *Sport Diver*, and as a change of pace, baby photography shoots. "I earn more now than 25 years ago, but I do have more outlets in teaching and editorial. I think it's fair to say that magazines do not pay as much as they did in the '80s and '90s."

John Bantin, a regular writer for *Undercurrent*, started as a photographer in general advertising first and was one of Britain's highest paid, making more than \$3 million in fees between 1970 and 1990. The most he earned for a photo was \$55,000 (a herd of horses in a Scottish glen for White Horse Whiskey). Then

Skip the Caribbean: Dive Your Nearest Golf Course

Feel like using your scuba skills for something lucrative? Forget searching for treasure in sunken ships. Diving for golf balls is where the real money is. With an estimated 300 million of the wayward golf balls lost in the U.S. alone each year, serious money can be made from their recovery -- if you're willing to take the plunge. Imagine swimming in a milkshake of silt. Now add weeds, broken bottles and every type of critter from leeches, to water snakes, even crocodiles, and you've pretty much got the idea of the perils of golf-ball diving.

Sam Harrison, a golf-ball hunter based in London, England, says in the U.K., there's an average of 5,000 golf balls in every lake. Harrison, 22, has a day job as a banker, but he also co-founded the company Lake Ball Diving. "Say we're selling the balls we find at an average 75 cents," he recently told CNN. "That would give \$3,700 per lake." He estimates that he could earn up to \$150,000 a year.

In the U.S., Paul Lovelace, who has been diving for "white gold" over the past three decades, previously worked as a search-and-recovery diver on offshore oilrigs before founding Golf Ball Paul's in Kansas City, KS. Lovelace, 54, says the most prized catch of all is the

Titleist Pro V1, which can retail for \$2 per ball. However, there are significant costs before he hits the water, and golf courses charge divers between seven and 10 cents per ball they find.

Then there are the hazards. Once in the water, you're lucky to see more than a foot in front of you, and Lovelace has one piece of advice for new divers: "If you're grabbing stuff down there and it's not round -- don't pick it up! In the Midwest, we have snapping turtles, and they can take off fingers and hands and toes and other extremities if you're not careful."

It goes beyond just snapping turtles. Last year, Jacques van der Sandt, 29, was killed by a crocodile while retrieving golf balls from a national park in South Africa. Steve Martinez, 51, was bitten by an alligator while diving at a Florida country club. In the UK, Harrison has to face water snakes, but he worries more about the water itself. "On some courses, the lakes are more like sewers. In those stagnant pools, you can catch diseases, so you have to wear a head guard so nothing can get on you."

Harrison says he'd much rather be diving in the Red Sea. "I'd rather be seeing some picturesque fish than broken beer bottles. But overall, I enjoy it. And you never know when you might find a lake where you hit the jackpot."

he specialized in underwater photography after joining the British magazine *Diver* in 1992. "I got the job because in those days, there were few who could reliably take pictures that were correctly exposed, in focus and nicely lit underwater. Computerized retouching made people like me redundant the first time. Digital photography made me redundant the second time -- it's simply too easy now."

Bret Gilliam (www.bretgilliam.com/magazine-publications.html), another frequent *Undercurrent* contributor, made his name in photography first as a magazine publisher (*Scuba Times* and *Fathoms* were just a couple). "But I also sold my work outside of my own publications, and there were years from the 1980s to the late 1990s when I easily grossed between \$75,000 and \$100,000 from both stock agency sales and assignments. Now I don't bother. Today's stock agencies practically give away photo images and make their money on other things like software sales for website development. The imagery is a loss leader to get the other sales. Although I still contribute to some print and online media, my compensation is really for my skills as a writer -- they haven't found a way to digitize professional writing yet."

But other photographers say there has never been a huge market for underwater photographs, much less full-time or well-paying jobs. "There were a few who had full-time jobs working for magazines, even fewer who were doing commercial work for advertising, and the rest probably worked in the diving industry in some way and also took pictures as dive instructors and tour operators," says Adam Hanlon, a U.K.-based photographer who supplements that income as editor of the photography blog *Wetpixel* (www.adamhanlon.com). "The full-timers and commercial photographers were often able to make a good living, but no one got rich. In fact, some had independent incomes that supported them. For those who did not, nearly all experienced long periods of financial hardship before they became successful."

Even 25 years ago, the famous Stan Waterman, while giving advice on underwater photography careers in *Ocean Realm* magazine had to admit the situation was close to someone wanting to become a tennis or golf pro. "Sure, a few will go on to fortune and fame, but the vast majority will end up teaching tennis or golf at the local course," says a renowned American underwater photographer who prefers to stay anonymous. "That was true for underwater photographers then and even more true now."

What They're Paying Now

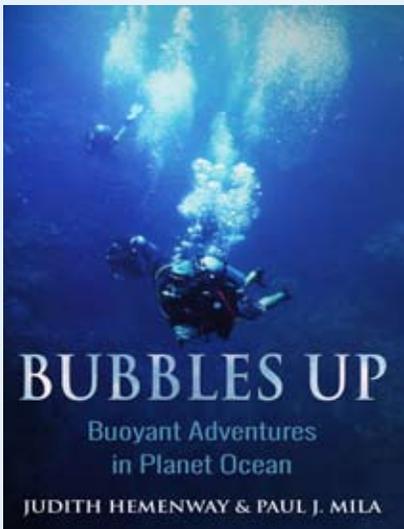
Here's the ideal underwater photography assignment: A two-year project to create a coffee-table book about the history of diving and getting a massive paycheck, first-class travel and even an expensive watch. That's what Gilliam finished last year -- production of the book *Fifty Fathoms*, financed by the Swiss watchmaker Blancpain. "They seemed to have a bottomless wallet," he says. "They recruited top professional writers and photographers like Ernie Brooks and Stephen Frink and generously compensated us, including first-class travel to places like French Polynesia for a film session lasting nearly two weeks at Fakarava Atoll, and to the French Riviera for the grand-release event last October. Blancpain knows how to take care of their VIPs -- they even gave me a \$25,000 watch. But those opportunities are few and far between."

A more typical opportunity: \$300 for a fantastic photo. That's what San Francisco-based Amos Nachoum (www.amosphotography.com) was offered for a rare picture of whales feeding on a penguin. However, Nachoum is determined to stand firm and state his own terms. "I tell them the smallest print size is a minimum of \$500, and that price goes up depending on the size." What makes sellers agree to Nachoum's terms is that he specializes in photographing big animal behavior. "I don't make many images, but they are rare and you can't find them anywhere else." His main clients, especially magazines, are overseas, Austrasia and Europe. "I hardly work with anyone here because they just don't pay. I can get \$5,000 stories in France; it's only \$500 in America."

The anonymous American photographer who compared his counterparts to tennis and golf pros says dive magazines have never paid well, and they've always offered horrible contracts. "They'll always

Bubbles Up

To kick off the summer, here's a good book to read, especially if you're not going diving but want to experience getting wet. Paul Mila, who writes thriller and adventure novels, decided that his latest book would be about his world-wide thrilling dive adventures, so



he teamed up with fellow diver Judy Hemenway to write *Bubbles Up*, a great collection of personal dive tales.

During their 2,000 collective dives, Hemenway and Mila have met plenty of colorful characters, both fish and people, in dive destinations all over. Their goal

for this book was to write about "Planet Ocean," and the amazing creatures that live in it. Both writers tell their tales in an amiable, friendly first-person style that will make you feel like you're right there with them underwater -- trying to get close to humpbacks in Tonga and Silver Bank, hangin' with barracudas named Elvis and Hercules in the Yucatan, and having a face-off with a killer cone snail in Papua New Guinea. There are also personal essays about diving itself, such as the right way to enter the water, bonding with your kids through scuba, and the trials and tribulations of operating a non-digital camera underwater. Great photos accompany nearly every story (Kindle is the best format to see them in their full-color detail).

Whether you are a diver or a snorkeler, you'll enjoy immersing yourself in these fascinating stories. Mila and Hemenway tell them with humor, sensitivity and style. It'll be like sitting on the beach, listening to old friends spin their dive stories just for you.

Add *Bubbles Up* to your summer book-reading pile. Buy it through us at www.undercurrent.org -- you'll get Amazon's best rate, and a part of each book sale we'll be able to use for reef conservations efforts.

have dozens, if not hundreds, of photographers asking for assignments, so the most experienced and skilled photographers will get the same ridiculous, predatory contracts that the magazines foist on eager, young up-and-comers.

David Haas, an Ohio-based photographer (www.haasimages.com), who shot the cover of our book *There's a Cockroach in My Regulator* (full disclosure: he was paid with a long-term subscription, extra books and a photo credit) has accepted the fact that the contract he'll get will be a "work for hire," which essentially gives away all rights for a set fee. "This used to be suicide in the image licensing world, and maybe for some shooters it still is. But I'm realistic that the chance of me licensing an image, due to not wanting to market as hard, is offset by getting paid right away.

Chris Huss, a Seattle-based photographer (www.chrishuss.com), says the "work for hire" angle is the biggest change in the photography markets -- it's not actually the price being paid, it's in the amount of image-use rights being demanded. "When you license an image to be published, the fee you should be paid should be based on the actual use. So an image used in advertising for a national corporation might be worth many thousands, where the same image used on a fish ID website might be worth \$50. The problem now is photo buyers want to pay one price and have the rights to use that image for anything related to the original use, in perpetuity."

Once, while negotiating photos for a textbook, Huss thought he was signing a contract that had an "all versions" photo clause, meaning his photos would be in hardcover, softcover, condensed, and other formats of that particular book edition. Instead, the contract had an "all editions" clause, meaning the fee was for use of his photo in all future book editions, all versions in web and print, and all promotions for the book. "I got \$200 for the photo, but that book has gone through five editions, so I was paid one-fifth of what I could have been paid. On the other hand, I signed an "all versions" contract for another book, I get \$200 for every edition printed, and there's no end in sight."

Huss estimates that fees paid by periodical publications have dropped by 20 percent, but when you add up all the additional-use rights now included, photographers are effectively being paid a quarter of what they used to get. For the stock photo market, it is much worse. Fees have dropped 50 percent or more for the initial use rights, but contracts now include far more rights, so effectively, income from stock sales is about 25 percent from before. None of them pays enough to cover the cost of doing business, he says. "If you are lucky to land a cover shot for one of the larger dive publications, that might pay \$1,000 -- which might cover the cost if you were shooting it at on your local shore dive, but that would be an exception. Generally, getting a cover shot requires a number of days in the field, at a minimum cost of several hundred dollars a day. You could get lucky, of course, but you can't run a business that way."

-- Vanessa Richardson

Next month in Part II: Some magazine publishers explain why they pay (or don't pay) for submissions, photographers explain how they're making money in other ways besides taking photos, and we explain what amateur snappers need to know about photo contests and contracts.

A Bad Night on the Wind Dancer

divers and crew endangered as reef rips open hull

There has been a spate of leaking and sinking liveaboards in recent months. For examples, see our March 2014 story "Choose Your Dive Boat Wisely," about three liveaboards in Thailand that sank within three weeks of each other last year, and last month's story about a typhoon that hit Truk that sunk the *Siren* and

badly damaged the *Odyssey*. We believe it's important to keep our readers apprised of liveboard dramas, and *Undercurrent* subscriber Joel Sill (Los Angeles, CA) had such a tale while aboard the *Wind Dancer* at Cocos Island in late April. After he made it back to the U.S., he wrote his story and shared it with us.

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On the evening of April 29, we were moored in Chatham Bay, Cocos Island. All the divers and some crew were having dinner in the salon; it was the night before heading back to the mainland at Puntarenas, Costa Rica. Suddenly, we heard the terrible sound of steel scraping, which increased as the ship starting banging up and down. I have been on boats that have run aground, and the sound is unmistakable. Everyone hurried to the dive deck, which is also the Muster Station. Looking astern, I could see we were smashing up on the rocks of what I believe was Manuelito Island (I'm not sure because it was dark and I don't know how far we drifted). The jagged rocks were covered with barnacles and foaming over with the typical surge. My first thought was, "If we have to go in the water, this is not a safe retreat," then I vaguely wondered about black-tip sharks.

The sound of scraping and smashing increased. It seemed we were being pushed higher on the rocks by the surge and now pinned on our starboard side, with the bow pointing down. The crew was in full emergency mode, trying to ascertain *Wind Dancer*'s condition and what action to take, and yelling frantically back and forth all over the ship. While nervous, they were trained, followed procedures as best as possible and did a superb job of keeping everyone calm. One of the crew from the galley instructed us to put on our life jackets. We went to our cabins to grab them, and some of us put on wetsuits, and stuffed phones and passports in waterproof bags. The couple in cabin 4, which is forward on the starboard side and below the waterline, said there was a large hole in the hull in their cabin, with water pouring in.

From my vantage point, the crew attacked the problems with two simultaneous approaches. One team worked outside outside to get the ship off the rocks, the other tried to stop the leaking inside. I later found out that they came up with a solution to use both Zodiacs lashed to the bow, crank the outboards to the max and pull the *Wind Dancer* free. This was all being done in the dark, in the surge and mostly with flashlights. It worked: The crew managed to pull *Wind Dancer* off the rocks. But once freed and afloat, the ship started to nose down and list to starboard. I went to Cabin 4 and saw that the hole was bigger than a basketball, but fortunately accessible for temporary repair.

Don't Sign This Lionfish Petition

In April, the Emerald Coast Reef Association (ECRA), based in Niceville, FL, put a petition on the popular website GoPetition.com titled "Support Lionfish Population Control and the Search for Eradication Methods." It's addressed to Florida State officials and the goal is to remove 5,000 lionfish from the Florida Panhandle in two years or less. It would have its diving volunteers, at their own risk and expense, each kill 100 lionfish and, in return, receive 10 native fish tags, good for in- or out-of-season spearfishing of two each of triggerfish, greater amberjack, red snapper, red grouper and gag grouper. There would be no limit to the number of tags that can be earned.

"Because the number of native fish requested to motivate participation is "biologically insignificant," the

motivator will cause no harm to our native fishery or shorten fishing seasons," writes ECRA president Candy Hansard in the petition.

Hold it, says Lad Akins, founder of the nonprofit Reef Environmental Education Foundation. "Giving permission to remove one out-of-season fish for every 10 killed is not going to solve this problem. It is only going to put more pressure on already impacted species (that is why there is a closed season in the first place). Derby programs and ongoing individual diver removal efforts are already removing well over 10,000 lionfish a year." He says the FWC has already come out against this plan, as have many others. The only beneficiaries, he says, will be the spearfishermen who want to take more grouper, snapper, etc., out of season."

So ignore this petition -- there are better ways to get rid of lionfish without having to use other fish as bait for spearfishers.

Once off the rocks and with the boat taking on water, one divemaster told my cabin mate we were going to sink. That caused serious agitation, but he may have been correct at that time. Fortunately, no one panicked, and we all stayed calm with the help of the crew, who worked diligently through the night. They started large pumps and began patching holes. One of the two rudders was sheared off. The crew was able to use the crane, capture it, then lash it to the crane base. When I asked about the other rudder, I was told it was leaking from the through hull bearing but could be repaired with a spare bearing. They managed to roughly patch the hole in cabin 4 though it kept leaking like a slow faucet. After a sleepless night (some of the crew were underwater, fixing the hull in scuba gear, for seven hours!), the captain and crew assessed all the damage. Water had leaked into the engine room and incapacitated one of the engines, but the Captain said he was confident we could get to port if he traveled slowly with the one engine and not autopilot, which might stress the remaining rudder. He also said there were contingency plans for the the *Okeanos* liveaboard to meet us if needed.

By now, the divers had several questions like, "Where the hell was the park ranger?" We were told no park ranger (there are now a few on the island) answered our Mayday. Then we found out that the nearest park ranger said his radio could receive but not send transmissions. (The park fee is \$490 and evacuation fee is \$30 a person.)

The next morning we headed to Puntarenas, all a bit tentative but grateful to a crew who helped avert what could have been a deadly incident. Luckily the seas were flat. Back in port at Puntarenas, the *Wind Dancer* owner came onboard, made apologies and said that after an in-depth investigation, he would somehow compensate the guests. In May, I received a letter from Larry Speaker, vice president of operations for the Aggressor Fleet (which manages trips for the *Wind Dancer*), and a \$500 voucher toward any future Aggressor or Dancer Trip for the two missed dives.

Some newer divers may have been emotionally damaged for life from the incident -- how far does a voucher go to cure that?

But a question remains: Was anyone on the bridge or on watch when the ship broke free from the mooring? If so, could this incident have been avoided? Several guests have sent me emails wondering what is going on with the promised investigation and explanation, but there has been no word.

They also feel it's unfair they were arbitrarily given a \$500 Aggressor/Dancer voucher when they paid cash for the trip. I, too, feel it's inequitable. It's a simple show of good faith for dive operators to just return the money and not force people to take another one of their vessels after such a harrowing experience. Some newer divers may have been emotionally damaged for life from the incident -- I witnessed the wife of a newly-married couple shaking, crying and justifiably terrified. How far does a voucher go to cure that?"

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We contacted Larry Speaker to ask for an update on the investigation of what happened on the *Wind Dancer*, but he said he wasn't allowed to speak to the media.

For any liveaboard going to a remote dive destination -- and Cocos Island is certainly one of the most remote -- crew and passengers aboard are on their own if trouble happens. To be prepared in case the worst happens, Ken Knezick, president of the dive travel agency Island Dreams Travel in Houston (www.divetrip.com), offers these recommendations for divers, and they start as soon as you go aboard:

- * Listen carefully to the safety briefings. Store your passport, wallet and other critical documents in a water-proof pouch that you can access at a moment's notice.
- * Know where your life jacket is stored, and where to find exit hatches and emergency muster stations.
- * Mark the locations of fire extinguishers and life preservers.
- * If you see anything out of the ordinary, call attention to the captain or cruise director immediately.
- * Where safety is concerned, assume nothing.

Flotsam & Jetsam

Amos: The Movie. In our story this issue about professional underwater photography, you'll read that Amos Nachoum says he started his travel outfit, Big Animals Expeditions, so he could make his niche as a top photographer of big-animal behavior. It could also make him a movie star. Two documentary filmmakers have been filming Nachoum while he has been filming animals, and they've started a crowdfunding campaign on Indiegogo to finish the production, by filming Nachoum and polar bears during a Canadian Arctic expedition this summer. *Amos: The Movie* is seeking \$30,000 funding -- a \$25 donation will let you download the film free when it is finished, \$1,000 will let you attend the film premiere, \$50,000 will let you attend the Arctic expedition and get you credit as executive producer. All donations are tax-deductible (www.indiegogo.com/projects/amos-the-movie#/story).

Download This Photo Magazine for Free.

Speaking of gorgeous photography, the Pacific Northwest Underwater Photographic Society produces a great, full-color magazine, *PNW Diver*, every two months and lets anyone download it free. The May/June issue is now online and features photo portfolios of Pacific sponges and the sinking of the HCMS Annapolis in British Columbia's Halkett Bay. Download it and past issues at www.pnwdiver.com

Diver Finds Some Skeletons "Just Chillin'." A diver at Colorado's Cienega Springs had quite the scare in early May when he discovered what he thought were skeletal human remains at the bottom

of the river. He phoned the sheriff's office, and a diver was sent down to inspect. What he found: an underwater party with two fake skeletons sitting in lawn chairs. They had been posed to look as though they were simply chillin' in the riverbed, complete with sunglasses and comfy chairs. One skeleton held an algae-covered sign, with only the date "8-16-2014" visible. Instead of reporting the skeletons, the startled diver should have just chilled along with them.

Where to Find Unique O-Rings. In last month's issue, reader Bruce Drucker lamented that Sony doesn't sell replacement O-rings for his underwater camera housing, and we commented how once most inexpensive housings go off the market, O-rings for them exit, too, so it's wise to stock up on them at initial purchase. However, reader Jim Rogers (Silverdale, WA) has this suggestion: "Contact McMaster Carr, an industrial supply company. They will in all probability have the correct size O-ring." Its website (www.mcmaster.com) says it has five locations and carries more than 555,000 products.

Nothing Illegal about Wearing Scuba Gear, Right?

A 48-year-old man wearing full dive gear caused quite a stir in Traverse City, MI, last month. The *Traverse City Record-Eagle* reported that the man, who had been drinking, showed up at a downtown McDonald's and acted quite belligerent. Workers called police, who found the man near the store, and told him that management didn't want him at the restaurant. Police don't know why he was wearing scuba gear, but Detective Sgt. James Bussell told the newspaper that "as far as wearing scuba gear and having a couple of beers, that's legal." So have no fear leaving your mask, fins and BC on while stopping for a Big Mac after you dive -- you're not breaking any law.

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