

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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MV Thailand Aggressor, Similan Islands

where have all the sharks gone? Soup!

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Dear Fellow Diver:

Deciding to take a dive trip to Southeast Asia just three weeks before departure meant planning would be tricky, but the Thailand Aggressor had space, and Richelieu Rock, often listed as one of the world's top 10 dive sites, beckoned me. Though I knew the craft had mixed reviews, the Aggressor Fleet website offered a last-minute 50-percent-off a seven-night charter, which was too good to pass up, especially after I saw the whale shark images on their website. I was hooked.

While four of us hung onto a pinnacle at 70 feet at Koh Bon, north of the Similan Islands, I thought about those whale shark images. I had been told that divers in another boat had seen whale sharks that morning, but I'd seen none, and now this was my last dive of the day. We had been drifting in a ripping current reminiscent of Palau's Blue Corner when we grabbed the rock, not an easy task without reef hooks. The current roared like a bullet train passing at full blast. But, nary a whale shark appeared, so after 10 minutes I let go, disappointed, and drifted off with my buddies. Maybe next time.

Before getting out, I made a safety stop over a huge patch of dead coral empty of fish. Though it had been 12 years since the tragic Indian



MV Thailand Aggressor and an Inflatable



Ocean tsunami hit Thailand (the Similan Islands were the initial point of impact), the coral destruction was largely caused by the 2010 ocean hot streak in the Gulf of Thailand, which bleached massive areas of coral. Dive sites were closed for more than a year to allow the coral to recover.

Earlier in the week, we dove the Similan Islands, which have fine beaches and small places to stay. Called the Nine Islands in the Yawi language, they are known by their numbers. Interestingly, many have massive boulders (about the size of a small SUV) along the shore, such as the impressive Elephant Head Rock in Donald Duck Bay (Similan Island #8).

Underwater, the boulders – some as large as a three-story house – created a surreal topography, with nice arches and swim-thrus, but with few cracks where fish can hide. So, fish watching wasn't much. I did find a spearing mantis shrimp, a juvenile Napoleon wrasse, a giant barracuda and a striped sea snake over the course of nine dives.

Although the diving at the Similans had been ho-hum, I had no complaints about the topnotch all-Thai crew. Jinny, the cruise steward, was always looking after us, keeping the cabins clean. Clive, the cruise director, made the trip click with his attitude, good humor and personal tales. Both he and Bank, the dive instructor, were excellent guides. The other divemaster, Rong, while excellent, took off with his camera on his own on at least two dives, leaving the rest of the group to wander and look for our own critters. That's not what divers pay for.

The two cooks, Pa and Pee Phorn (I smile as I recall their names), kept us well fed. For the light breakfast before the first dive, I had coffee and cereal. Afterward, one could order eggs any way from Clive, accompanied by bacon and home-made bread as well as an amazing range of fruits. Because the large breakfast was enough to keep me going until dinner time, I skipped lunch one day and had soup and fruit the other days. Of course, I could not pass up the mid-afternoon snacks of pastries filled with meat, fish, or fruit. One day we had chocolate-covered ice cream.

The three-course dinners (appetizer/soup, main dish, and dessert) were served in an elegant candlelight setting of white tablecloths and napkins, with the crew in uniform. The best meal of the trip: barbecued fish. Exquisite. A close second

Urban Diving after a Rain Storm

One of the students of Ken Kurtis, owner of Reef Seekers Dive in Beverley Hills, CA, said he'd heard you shouldn't beach dive for 72 hours following a storm. Kurtis responded:

"Maybe, maybe not. A lot depends on whether the beach is close to storm drain runoffs. At Corral Canyon in Malibu, there's a storm drain that dumps out under the Pacific Coast Highway and cuts through the west end of the beach and into the oceans. During heavy rains, all sorts of stuff might wash down from on high and into the beach waters. Since the prevailing long

shore current runs from west to east, if you dive on the western up-current side of the outfall, you might be OK. But on the eastern down-current side, you might find a higher trash/bacteria count. Just use common sense.

"Most of the time, what's really affected by the storms — and not just at Corral — is the visibility. So sometimes diving has nothing to do with whether it's a health issue, but simply whether or not you can see things, like your hand in front of your face."

Fancy Bikini?

Wreck divers have always been attracted to the Marshall Islands and the Bikini Atoll, where in 1946, President Truman ordered the testing of the atomic bomb. More than 80 surplus warships were anchored in the Bikini lagoon while atomic bomb Abel was dropped on them. But the effect was inconsequential. So the Navy detonated a second atomic bomb (Baker), which sank most of the vessels. Subsequently, the U.S. conducted more than 60 nuclear tests at Bikini, including one that vaporized an island.

Bikini Atoll is now the ships' graveyard, which most notably includes Yamamoto's flagship, the *Nagato*, the

USS Arkansas, and the Lexington-class aircraft carrier *USS CV-3 Saratoga* (at 888 feet long, one of the largest diveable shipwrecks in the world).

With the demise of Bikini Atoll Divers, which was based in Majuro, it's been difficult for divers to visit Bikini, apart from infrequent trips led by Peter Mesley from Australia, but now the *Truk Master* promises to visit Bikini Atoll in 2018. If diving on famous WWII warships appeals to you, act fast, because availability will be limited, and it will be suitable only if you're happy to dive to 180 feet (55m). www.masterliveboards.com

was the last night's filet mignon. Several dishes with sides of fresh veggies got "compliments to the chef" from us divers. Jinny kept pouring complimentary wine for those forgoing the night dive, and those who did dive received hot chocolate laced with Kahlua once done. I confess. My love for diving takes second place to my love for wine. In any case, night diving was restricted to the three nights spent at the Similan Islands.

The nine guests comprised a diverse slice of the international community: a Pole living in Moscow, a Hungarian living in New Zealand, an American born in Cuba, couples from America and China, and a delightful Scottish couple – wife Jenny, a nurse, entertained us with her hospital tales of treating the Queen. While I normally enjoy learning about the interests and experiences of my fellow liveaboard divers, this trip was different. With the U.S. election at hand, heated discussions ensued, and it was not until two days after the election that we got word of the results. To a person, the non-American guests expressed dismay. We Americans were mixed. Being cut off from the news had been unnerving, and the lack of details made the results difficult to digest; it was like being told that a nuclear attack had taken place, but not the location.

Diving Richelieu Rock was indeed the trip's highlight. Rising just a few feet above the surface, it's an amazing dive site, worthy of a place in a top 10 list. On my first dive, I was dazzled by a seamount alive with a profusion of red, pink, and orange soft corals, and dominated by stunning purple corals, creating a beautiful garden landscape. Anemones were everywhere. My fish ID skills were overwhelmed by the legions of fish surrounding me: all kinds of parrotfish, angelfish, triggerfish, and butterflyfish. A school of Chevron barracuda cruised overhead, while groupers and large Napoleon wrasses ambled past. Four cuttlefish hung around, with two cuddling (or is it cuttling?), before mating. A small school of lionfish hovered in one spot. Critters filled every nook and cranny.

Five more dives followed, each offering something new. One diver filled three pages with the names of fish that she had



Shoreline of a Similan Island

MV Thailand Aggressor, Similan Islands

Diving (Experienced)	★★★½
Diving (Beginner).....	★★
Accommodations	★★★★
Food.....	★★★★
Service and attitude.....	★★★★★
Money's worth at full price.....	★★½

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

Worldwide scale

seen. But I saw no whale sharks or mantas; it was off season. Come back February to April, I was told. No matter, the waters were alive.

There is a dark side to Richelieu Rock: no sharks. Their absence bothered me. I wondered whether it was just my luck, so afterward I checked the charter logs on the Aggressor website. Of the 16 trips between November 2016 to late March 2017, four had no sharks. Six sharks were the most seen on any given trip, with the most exciting findings being two leopard sharks and an eight-foot guitar shark. Shark-finning boats have taken their toll.

But, underwater there were plenty of people. Endless day boats arrived from Khao Lak, on the Thai mainland, causing a severe traffic jam. One morning, seven cattle boats arrived loaded with divers, and none

coordinated dive times. Underwater I would hear a boat approach and soon be surrounded by divers. We had Richelieu Rock to ourselves only for the last two dives, after the day boats had departed.

I had hesitated to book the Thai Aggressor (once serving as the PNG Star Dancer) because Undercurrent readers had reported problems with the boat. So I emailed the Aggressor office to ask about the state of repair. Wayne Hasson, president of the Aggressor Fleet, quickly replied that it had been in dry dock, and they had made improvements. Onboard, I found that the worn, funky carpets had been replaced, the cabins had engineered wood floors. Though clearly not luxurious as many newer liveaboards, the vessel was entirely adequate. The eight cabins are all on the main deck, with the camera table and diving deck aft. Go up one flight to the dining room, then up another to a covered sundeck, a hot tub, and two hammocks.

My cabin, as well as the seven others, had two single beds – I stored my luggage beneath mine – and a cabinet for clothing and equipment. (The crew had placed a welcoming note on each bed, a towel rolled up in the shape of an elephant or so I thought -- and a set of blue lounge pants.) From my bed, I had a sea view through the large window. The decent-sized bathroom had a shower and toilet. The room AC controls worked well – important, because I hate entering a freezing cabin after a dive.

The enthusiastic and efficient dive crew filled tanks to capacity, with the nitrox mix spot-on, and gave dive briefings from slides. While often we dived off the platform, other dives required our walking down the stairs to the dive deck and making that clumsy and often tricky step into the inflatable dinghies. They divided us into two groups, one of four divers, the other of five. Once at the site, we backrolled into the water in unison. Dives with Bank and Clive as dive-masters were a joy, since they always found interesting critters. Visibility was in the 40-foot range. Dives lasted more than 50 minutes with a maximum depth in the 85- to 95-foot range. My 3mm wetsuit and hooded vest kept me warm in the 82F water. After returning to the mother craft, the crew toted our gear to the diving deck and brought hot towels, helped us out of wetsuits, and rinsed and hung them.

Not all dives were easy. Because of the strong current, on one of our last dives, we descended via the anchor line. Led into the current by Rong, I depleted my air too fast and decided to ascend when I hit 500psi, but since Rong was not looking at me, I used another 200psi kicking to him to signal my ascent.

Fortunately, the current had subsided, and I burned the rest of my air in a safety stop, then surfaced with a spent tank. The boat was just a leisurely swim away.

The early November weather was nearly perfect, to my good fortune. The Similan Islands and Richelieu Rock are closed during the rainy season, May to October, due to rough seas, so I knew I was on the cusp in early November. In fact, I learned that rough seas the previous week had made diving difficult, but we only had brief showers early in the week, and then the seas turned eerily flat.



Twin cabin on the *MV Thailand Aggressor*

The great service on the boat did not extend to the pickup arrangements upon arrival. My instructions stated that a staff member would meet me at the Phuket Airport international arrival exit, but two days before departure, I received an email stating that the pickup would be moved outside the arrival door, in front of the "TMB" money-changer, at 4 p.m. Since my flight arrived at 1 p.m., I was left with three hours of waiting around, an undesirable arrangement. For an hour I searched for the TMB money-changer, making inquiries of police and terminal employees, but none could help. Frustrated and annoyed, I decided to wait by the arrival door. My mood improved when another diver showed up, also confused about the arrangements. Eventually, the shuttle showed up, well after 4 p.m.

The shuttle took us to Tap (or Thap or Tab) Lamu Pier, about 12 miles south of Khao Lak, and 45 miles (80 minutes) north of the Phuket Airport. The pier is unremarkable except for the presence of a large number of liveaboards and the Thai

Have You the Proper Travel Documents?

If you book your own international flights, you risk not knowing the travel document rules of countries to which you are traveling — or even in which you are changing planes. If you have failed to abide ahead of time, you may face an exceptionally long wait or even get sent home — at your expense. Some countries will not let you in if your passport expires in less than six months, others will not admit you if you don't have a specified number of blank passport pages, and there are other arcane rules that are difficult to know.

For example, travel Guru Christopher Elliott, in his *Elliott's Daily Report* email, recently told of a traveler flying to Asia from Seattle, with a connection in Canada (many divers do this because of better fares on such airlines as Air Canada and Cathay Pacific). When he arrived at the Seattle airport, he was told that because his flight stopped in Vancouver, he needed an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA). Because he had not done this ahead of time, the Air Canada agent had to handle it, but it took so long that he missed his

first flight.

Knowing that if he canceled his next flight from Vancouver, he would be able to recoup some of the cost, so he emailed Air Canada to cancel. But that's not an instantaneous way to cancel, and he was declared a no show and lost all that he paid. To avoid problems such as not knowing Canada's ETA rules or Indonesia's U.S. passport rules or scores of other document issues, there is a solution.

The website <http://www.iatatravelcentre.com> allows you to enter your trip details and determine your documentation requirements.

You can also get documentation information from the U.S. State Department at this site: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en.html>

While a savvy travel agent will clue you into the requirements, if you insist on planning your own trips, these sites can save you from a disaster.

Navy. After the charter had ended, I stayed two more nights to explore the Khao Sok National Park.

I did enjoy my trip aboard the Thailand Aggressor, though I was disappointed in the lack of sharks. But, as I must remind myself, there are no guarantees in diving. Richelieu Rock was exceptional, but not enough for me to recommend this trip with the long travel time. For high-octane diving closer to home, I suggest Socorro or the Sea of Cortez. You will not get much coral, but interactions with large sea life are guaranteed.

-- LDV

Our undercover diver's bio: *"I have made more than 500 dives and been on 18 liveaboards since 2002: Galapagos, Great Barrier Reef, Bahamas, Coral Sea, Turk & Caicos, Socorro, Little Cayman, Palau, Sea of Cortez, Cocos, Truk, Philippines, Fiji, and now the Similan Islands. One of my aims in life is to continue diving forever."*



Diving Compass: My half-off deal was \$1645 (a last-minute deal, but \$1000 discounts are common for this charter); round-trip flights from the Midwest \$1135, with two overnight layovers in Hong Kong. . . . If you go through Hong Kong, best stay on the mainland; the Airport Express takes you to Central Station in just 25 minutes, with trains leaving every 10 minutes; the Hotel Ibis Hong Kong Central (\$125 per night) is nearby. . . .Taxis in Hong Kong are cheap. Everybody speaks English. Hong Kong is fun, with something for everybody.

Belize, Vieques, Indonesia, Molokai

Christmas crowds, lousy food, white tips and mantas

Last year, *Undercurrent* was the first to write about a new find in Belize — Itza Lodge — and our reviewer was quite pleased with the operation, from the accommodations to the service to the diving. Since that review, as one might imagine, there has been some evolution in the resort, as Richard McGowan (Fairfield, CT) describes after visiting **Itza Lodge in Belize** during February. He wrote, "We found this gem from *Undercurrent* (February 2016), so it was a little out-dated — though the underwater parts were very much spot-on.

"In December 2016, Arthur and Selina took over management of Itza, bringing along Elta, the fabulous cook, who makes everything from scratch, and it is delicious. From the bakery goods to plantain chips to fish fillet. What more can I say?"

He makes a few observations that could be crucial to a comfortable stay. "Bring bug spray. We didn't have any sand fly issues, but it was windy all but one day (February and March are the windiest). You need a small flashlight at night to find the

bathroom without putting the light on, assuming you have company, as it can be pitch-black. They started upgrading the solar-heated hot water system to cover fewer rooms per unit, so expect better water [supplies] than we got — mostly maybe luke-warm at best. It didn't help that everyone tried taking a shower at the same time after the last dive."

Regardless of the minor problems, if you're looking for a small, isolated Caribbean resort, give this a go. Another one to check out in Belize: Turneffe Island. www.itzalodge.com

While many of our readers seem to be interested solely in diving during a trip, in December the adventurous Mark Thorne (Raleigh, NC) decided to try a company called "**Bonaire from the Sea,**" which he says "marries diving, dining, and sailing in perfect balance. If you love diving, you definitely love being both above and below the water while being able to see the sights from the vantage point of a sailboat [rather than the more normal shore diving]. And if that were not enough, Bonaire from

the Sea offers up some of the best gourmet food I have ever eaten.” www.bonairefromthesea.org

Many divers who travel on the *MV Cayman Aggressor* do so because they want to visit Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, not just spend a week on Grand Cayman sites, which are all easily reached from resorts. That doesn't always happen, as Paul McFall (Cumming, GA) reports: “The weather was a bit windy most of the week, which kept us around Grand Cayman for the entire trip.” He went in November, and it's the winter months that can keep the *Aggressor* from making the 70+ mile crossing to the sister islands. If you don't want to chance that your diving will be limited only to Grand Cayman, try another season. (You'll find a lot of reader reports on *Undercurrent* citing this problem.) www.aggressor.com

Of course, the winter is when people like to go to the warm Caribbean, and Christmas can be even a bigger problem, as Rose Mueller (Houston, TX) said she was concerned beforehand about diving with **Scuba Du/El Cantil**, in **Cozumel** during Christmas week. She reported afterward: “I cannot believe the changes in Cozumel. Twenty planes arrived on the 24th of December. Most days there were seven or eight cruise ships. There were so many boats and divers, it was difficult for a photographer, if not impossible.” How to beat the crowds during Christmas: those little hotels on isolated Belize Cayes, Cayman's sister islands, more isolated Roatan resorts, Dominica, Tobago. www.scubadu.com

Disappointment can be more common than we'd like to think, and we find it important to point out problems that divers can avoid. Of course, operations get better (or worse) all the time, but with all the options we have, why chance ruining an expensive dive trip? Hartley B. Wess (Albuquerque, NM) went on *MV Humboldt Explorer* in the **Galapagos Islands** in January, and wrote later, “From the condition of the ship to the food, to the dive guides, even our most minimal expectations were not fulfilled. Hardly any of the crew spoke English other than the head dive guide, who took ill after the second day. The bartender then had the additional duties of one of only two dive guides, [which meant he spread his duties rather thinly.]” www.humboldtexplorer.com

Equally disappointed in a trip on a **Master** live-aboard was Gregg Backmeyer (Atlantis, FL), but he accepts the blame, “**The Galapagos Islands** was a bucket list trip, and unfortunately, did not rate an ‘A’. My biggest complaint was [partly] of my own doing. I should know never to count upon

Award Winning Scuba Travel Guides

Steve Rosenberg and Greg Bassett have published a series of excellent scuba travel eBook guides, and *Dive and Travel Grand Cayman* has received a silver award in the 2016 North American Travel Journalists Association Travel Media Competition the category “best travel books and guides.”

Interactive, it lists more than 75 dive sites, marine life, above-water activities, travel, accommodations, shopping, and site-seeing opportunities, as well as the island's history. It's illustrated with the author's own fine photographs, and it can also be used as a dive log. It's currently \$7.23 on Kindle from Amazon.

A new book, still a work in progress, is *Dive the Visayas, the Heart of the Philippines*. Other books by the same authors include *Dive Galapagos* (2nd edition) at \$14.95 and *Dive Cozumel* (\$8.95), plus *A Naturalist's Guide to the Galapagos*, which is downloadable for free, and available on iTunes, Amazon, and Google Play. <http://www.rosenbergebooks.com>

a provider's equipment, yet I let myself listen to their insistence that they had lots of men's 7mm wetsuits on board the *MV Deep Blue*. [In fact] they had two men's suits and none to fit me. I'd left my Pinnacle Merino wool 7mm at home. What a serious mistake! You will need a 7mm suit for this trip.” www.deepbluegalapagosdiving.com

And that is a cautionary tale. There are three pieces of personal gear that you ought to take with you. First, your mask, to ensure the proper fit, especially if you have corrective lenses in it. Second, if you're headed to cool water, take your wetsuit, for the reasons Backmeyer points out. We hear too many tales of woe where people leave their suits at home to reduce their luggage, but find the water too cool for whatever the operator provides them, which at times is nothing at all. People get especially surprised on Komodo trips, where water drops into the low 70s. Or winter Bahamas trips, where water can even drop below 70°F (21°C). I might add, it's wise to bring your own computer, too, because you know how it works and it is specific to your diving history.

Let us move on to the brighter side and highlight a rarely discussed operation, **Molokai Fish and Dive**, with whom Marcia Pedersen (Deming, WA) went out in December. Boats from Lahaina, **Hawaii**,

make the crossing to Molokai periodically, but wind and waves often make it impossible. But the diving is arguably better than any other place Lahaina boats reach, including Lanai. And Pederson found that out.

“We were completely blown away by our first day of diving — healthy reef, white tip reef sharks, eagle rays, puffers, big green morays, more than eight big turtles, and tons of reef fish. The rest of the week we had lower visibility, but we still saw big and little fish, including mantas.

“The shop serves many purposes, including whale watching, fishing, spear fishing, diving, and snorkeling, so they have to choose sites that fit. They did whale watching on separate days, and they took spear fishermen on a separate boat. We had snorkelers on our boat each day.”

The dive operation offers condo rentals. There’s not much happening on Molokai, not much at all — after all, its population is barely 7,500 — but if that’s your cup of tea, you know you can find some pretty fine Hawaiian diving. And you won’t have Christmas crowds. “Be sure to do the mule ride.”

www.molokaifishanddive.com

Of course, no matter where you go, the staff can make all the difference to the success of your trip. Lynn Klassen (Egmont, BC) went on KLM Euphoria **in Raja Ampat**, Indonesia, last November. She said, “Our hopes of what was to be a trip of a lifetime were diminished by the self-described part-owner/manager, Artur. One would expect that a person in that position would lead by example and ensure that his guests left his boat at the end of the trip wanting to recommend his boat to friends and the diving community. [In fact] we counted down the last days to when we would get back to land.

“Prior to each dive, Artur would give a dive briefing. It didn’t take too long to realize that his briefings were incomplete or didn’t match the site that we would dive. The first issue was when his guides insisted on swimming into the current. I can understand it when there is something to see and might be worth the effort, but after it was repeated a couple of times, I went to him and requested that he talk to the guides to change that. During the exchange, I found him to be defensive and show little interest in speaking to the guides.”

Laurel Silver-Valker’s Sons Sue

We last reported on the disappearance of Laurel Silver-Valker, 45, in *Undercurrent* August 2016, when we told of Captain Kyaa Heller’s remorse at failing to pick her up from Ship Rock off Catalina Island, where she was diving the previous December. Silver-Valker had been aboard the *Sundiver Express* that day as a volunteer crew-member.

It was nearly her thousandth dive, but it was to be her last. Coast Guard documents confirmed that Laurel, as a crew member, was not on the initial passenger roster, the same list that was used to confirm that all divers were out of the water and safely back on the boat. It was only after the vessel reached the second dive site that the crew realized she was not on board.

Defense attorney David Rose, defending Sundiver in a civil law suit brought by her sons, alleged she had enjoyed little sleep the night before, she had no BCD, and she was diving solo. She apparently went deep, while carrying no surface-signaling device. Her body was never recovered.

Jorge Lopez, attorney acting on behalf of the plaintiffs, says that anyone was allowed to dive solo under Captain Heller, and although Rose says that Laurel

drysuit dived without a BCD or wing, the same could be said for Heller, who evidently blamed the divemasters for the lack of an effective roll call. One newly qualified DM was around 20 years old and participated in the first dive, while the other was a 19-year-old and not certified as a DM, but acted as deckhand.

Lopez says a dive slate (plastic dry-erase board) was used that day and somehow there was a checkmark next to Laurel’s name that showed that she re-boarded the boat. Nobody takes responsibility for this, leaving the inference that it was an old checkmark from a prior dive day that never got fully erased.

Captain Heller surrendered her captain’s license as a result of the Coast Guard investigation. By surrendering instead of having it revoked, she is allowed to re-apply after one year.

Although the Sundiver boat company continues to operate from Long Beach, the U.S. Coastguard confirms that it is investigating *Sundiver Express* captain Heller for negligence. Sundiver’s insurance company, Lloyds of London, has filed a declaratory relief action, asking the court to find there was no insurance coverage for the incident meaning there might not be any pay out in the event of the plaintiffs being successful.

Treasure Trove in Lake Travis

For the last nine years, Rob Weiss has owned and operated Lake Travis Scuba. Despite enjoying obvious success teaching scuba lessons, he discovered an untapped source of income at the bottom of the lake. He reckons he and his diving staff have collected \$73,000 worth of items — and “that’s a conservative, estimated value.”

He and his team have found wallets, iPhones, GoPro cameras, wedding rings and necklaces, and so many pairs of sunglasses, including RayBans, that he and fellow instructor, Matt Jacobs, have created a sunglasses hunter’s certificate said to be accredited as a specialty course by PADI.

Notwithstanding the notional ‘value,’ Weiss claims he has “made more than \$1000 in an effortless approach” to selling off his treasure trove. We guess he means he could have got more if he’d tried!

CBS Austin, which originally reported this story, consulted attorneys, and many of them stated that as long as nobody is publicly looking for a lost item, it can become the property of the finder. Maybe so in Texas, but not necessarily so in other territories where such finds can be considered stealing unless turned in to the proper authorities — and what about those wallets? He sure can find the owner of those!

She said the majority of the crew “did whatever they could to make our experience memorable,” but there was a language barrier, and from a long list of criticisms, the problems with the cuisine stand out.

“Food is probably the most important aspect of life on a boat. At the beginning it was palatable, but meals became mundane, essentially the same menu of fish, rice, beans, and some sort of spinach-type vegetable. Soups were tasteless broth, and desserts were without flavor. . . . When passengers start preferring toast for dinner over the offerings from the kitchen, it says everything. After the main course had been left untouched one night, there was a change from fish to chicken. Unfortunately, this was incompletely cooked, so we passed on that as well. . . . When we had a barbecue on the beach, it was amazing to be sitting on white sand in a tropical paradise with a roaring fire by the water’s edge, but the chicken that came off the grill was again not properly cooked.

“At some point, the water coming through the water maker started to taste of salt. One would have expected there to be more choice for soft drinks other than Coca-Cola, Tang, and some drink called ‘juice’ derived from powder.

“I expect Artur will question why there were no complaints made to him about the food, [but] the response by him to previous issues raised was poor at best.”

I surely would have groused, because, for a \$3500, 11-night trip, I’d expect damn good food (which may be why they’re offering a discount on their website). But, the truth is, once you’re at sea, you’re stuck with whatever is provisioned (unless

they buy from locals), though you would expect it to be cooked properly. So, before you select a vessel you know little about, see what your fellow *Undercurrent* readers or reviewers say before you sign up. If we have no reviews, that might just be enough for you to find another operator. It says either no one goes there because they have not heard good things, or the operation is too new to review (and perhaps too new for you to risk big bucks on). <http://euphoria.liveaboardiving.net>

Indonesia is a long way to travel to discover your accommodations or food are not up to scratch. That can happen in vessels that are improvised in their conversion from a previous purpose to a liveaboard dive vessel. Last September, Diane and Sherm (Irvine, CA) boarded *MV Seven Seas* for a trip south of Flores, only to find, “Our cabin, one of the larger ones, I think, was small at about 10x12 feet (3x4m). It was minimal but OK. The bed was at least 3.5 feet off the floor, accessible only from one side and at the foot, with a small stool used to get into bed. If the person on the wall side got up, he had to climb over the other to get out of bed and back in. The teensy bathroom was not air-conditioned and was open to the outside so that it was always quite hot.”

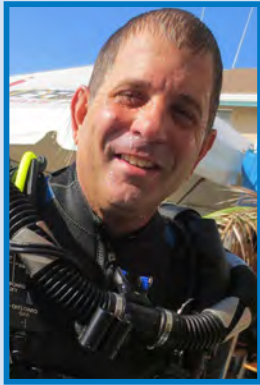
However, the diving was so good [it made up for the shortfalls in the boat facilities], they said that they were glad they went and would do it again next fall. www.thesevenseas.net

Ellen Marie Smith (Edina, MN) writes that she has found our reader reports very helpful, and booked a trip out of **Cabo San Lucas on the *Solmar V*** in January. Her criticism: “The only thing I had a strong opinion about is the boat itself.

Well-Known Rebreather Diver in the News Again

It looks like times are going to get busy for Peter Sotis, a well-known personality in the rebreather world. The *Florida Keys News* broke the story on March 27 that he and his company, Add Helium, are to be the defendants in a law suit brought about the family of famous Canadian film maker Rob Stewart, who lost his life while diving under Sotis' instruction at Islamorada, in the Keys on January 31.

The *Florida Keys News* says he has a history of legal issues including being one of four defendants to plead guilty in a \$300,000 jewelry heist in Fort Myers in 1991, a conviction that led to him serving three years in a federal prison.



Peter Sotis

Photo: Rosemary Lunn
Underwater Marketing Co.

“When you learn more about these defendants and the history of negligent behavior by people like Mr. Sotis, you come to realize this was a preventable tragedy that was going to happen to someone,” Michael Haggard,

of the Haggard Law Firm, said in a statement.

“The Stewart family hopes the legal action will push out and/or change the ways of all irresponsibly operating diving businesses and help keep attention on Stewart’s mission of ocean conservation.”

In a bizarre twist, the rebreather instructor trainer who accompanied Rob Stewart and who had trained him to use the rebreather he was wearing when he died in January, is being sued twice over. In an unusual lawsuit, Sotis is being accused of selling military grade scuba gear to Libyan militants.

The *Florida Keys News* says he is also being sued by Shawn Robotka, who owns one-fifth of Sotis’ business, Kaizen International Solutions LLC. Robotka’s attorneys wrote in a complaint filed in Broward County Circuit Court that Sotis sold rebreathers and Diver Propulsion Vehicles to a client in Libya.

It is unclear whether the sale went ahead or if Sotis is under any investigation for a breach of government sanctions. His attorney, Raymond Robin, says he doesn’t know. The FBI is tight-lipped on the matter. Sotis is apparently out of contact at the moment.

Solmar V is an old boat that charges new boat prices. The cabins are all below deck and noisy, with water lapping and galley stomping constant.” The diving? She found it fantastic, as people report from those islands, regardless of the craft they take, and there are several visiting, most notably two Nautilus boats and the Valentina. www.solmarv.com

It is true that the quality of the diving can make us overlook some inconveniences. Mark Magers (Oakland, CA) told of an open ocean dive site he went to with **East Cape Explorers**, on the **Pacific coast of Mexico**, in December. “Gordon Banks is a seamount with a top at about 110 feet (33m). It is known for its hammerheads, mobula rays, whale sharks and occasional bait balls with attacking billfish, making it a favorite spot for fishermen as well. After seeing some very cool videos on YouTube, we were excited to give it a try. We went out from the East Cape Explorers base at San Jose del Cabo Marina.”

He never actually got to see the seamount itself, but the trip lived up to expectations, with blue water diving around it exceeding his expecta-

tions, and he signed off, “We’ll be back for sure.” www.eastcapeexplorers.com

The flip side of that particular coin is that it matters little if the facilities are top-rate when the diving is disappointing. Diving in **the Maldives** during February/March, Gail M. King (Port Orange, FL) was disappointed, although she went at the best time for big animal encounters. She wrote, “I wish, I wish our liveaboard *MV Carpe Vita* was in a different location. It was a floating hotel... our standard cabin was huge by liveaboard standards, the salon was large and comfy, as was the upper sun/shade deck. I expected to be impressed by the diving, from all I had researched, but the word had not gotten out as to the reef conditions that happened last year, which really sent the reefs into a death spiral. Bottom line...don’t go.” www.carpediemmaldives.com

Isla Nena Scuba was the dive center of choice for Mark Zahorik (Chicago, IL), when in January he went to **Vieques**, a tiny island off the southeastern coast of **Puerto Rico**. Half the island is a park, and the remainder has a small, slow-pace tourist

infrastructure. He reported “Very relaxing dives with good visibility, with healthy corals and marine life. We saw several rough tail southern stingrays, one 6-foot (2m) nurse shark, many schools of snapper and grunts — with half-a-dozen lionfish” (seven of which he dispatched with his spear).

www.islanenascuba.com

St. Maarten is the transfer point for Saba, St. Eustatius and other diver islands, but few people stay long enough to take a dive. George Lynch (Duxbury, MA) was pleased with his dives with **Ocean Explorers in Little Bay** during January.

He wrote, “I have dived with numerous shops, and this was probably the best service I have had in over 30 years. They are very good at pointing out creatures and assisting those who inevitably require it. We saw lots of Caribbean reef sharks, turtles, morays, stingrays, lobsters, occasional spotted eagle rays, and a fair assortment of the usual Caribbean reef fish, plus a few wrecks.” With an endless number of hotels in all price ranges, it seems that the diving with Ocean Explorers is good enough to merit a stopover.

www.stmaartendiving.com

Of course, it’s different strokes for different folks. Some of us will put up with any discomfort providing that the diving is exceptional, whereas others consider creature comforts an absolute essential. We believe our reports provide a realistic way of managing expectations as you plan your next trip.

So, to aid your fellow *Undercurrent* subscribers, please send us a report on your last dive trip. Send details of any trips you’ve made in the last six

Dolphins Getting High?

It’s well known that dolphins like to play games with things like bits of seaweed, but researchers have observed a pod passing around a puffer fish to one another with their flippers. When provoked, the particular species of puffer fish emits a nerve toxin called tetrodotoxin, which can be lethal to humans. However, scientists speculate that not only can dolphins withstand small doses, but also, they can experience a narcotic effect — in other words, get high. Typically, during these play sessions, they leave the puffer fish alive, maybe to ensure the effect lasts longer.

Murdoch University (Perth, Australia) researcher Krista Nicholson monitors the activity of dolphins living in Australia’s coastal waters. She says that she has seen similar behavior of dolphins getting high, and there are more examples across the globe. A BBC documentary, “Dolphins – Spy in the Pod,” captured footage of dolphins engaging in this strange activity in 2014. Some dispute the theory, claiming they only manipulate the puffer fish to get a numbing sensation from the toxin. (Source: *AOL News*)

months by filling out our online form. You can follow the link “File a Report” on the left side of our homepage at www.undercurrent.org. Or after logging in, follow the “Reader Report” link in the top navigation bar.

Thanks very much. We exist because of you.

- Ben Davison

A Cozumel Tragedy

sometimes only a buddy knows what happened

Divers arriving in Cozumel, Mexico, can sign up with any number of dive operators — and generally are organized into groups and frequently not assigned buddies. Much of the diving is drift diving, which can lead to problems if a diver in a group needs to return to the surface early. That’s what appears to have happened to a woman on February 19th near Palancar Reef, with fatal consequences.

We contacted several people in Cozumel to learn about the tragedy, but had great difficulty getting

anyone to tell us what actually happened, and some inquiries were met with an aggressive response. One witness even replied, “Mexico isn’t a salubrious environment for whistleblowers, or even journalists who merely dare to expose events seen as detrimental to the profit margins of vested interests. Cozumel is a small place, the tourist and diving industries have a lot at stake here, and human life is worth very little.” Wow. This probably explains the reluctance of anyone to give any information.

This is the story *Undercurrent* distilled after some detective work and confirmed in part by a British diver who was there at the time, aboard a *Deep Blue* dive boat:

The dive had not started well for Tammy R. Schmitz, 43, from Denver (CO), diving with Scuba Mau's *Gaviota I*. Some witnesses reported she had trouble with her BC inflator mechanism, and once

If anything else went wrong, it could lead to an incident

at the dive site, she found it was not compatible with the regulator and her direct-feed hose. In order not to lose the dive, she probably intended to inflate it orally as and when she needed buoyancy. A well-practiced diver can handle this, but if anything else went wrong, it could lead to an incident.

And something did go wrong. During the dive, she decided to surface because she apparently wasn't feeling well. Local 19-year-old dive guide, Ricardo Loeza, who was assisting Instructor Paulín Fuentes, escorted her up to the depth of a safety stop. He had to be quick because of the current: He could easily lose contact with the rest of the group he was escorting. We were told that he passed her his delayed surface marker buoy, leaving her there, assuming she was competent enough to complete a safety stop and then make it the short distance to

the surface. He re-joined his charges back at depth and continued the dive. Cozumel marine park regulations state that the ratio of guides to certified divers is 6:1.

We don't know what happened next. Schmitz' computer would not have recorded whether she actually made the surface (they usually stop recording at around 5 feet [1.5m] deep), but her lifeless body was discovered by a pair of divers from a different group sometime later back on the seabed. She had no buoy. The computer appears now to be in possession of the police.

Brian Highe (High Wycombe, UK) told *Undercurrent*: "We were diving on Palancar Reef from one of two *Deep Blue* boats that morning. We had completed our first dive and were just about to return to shore when there was a lot of chatter in Spanish on the VHF. Our captain took our boat alongside a second dive boat, which had two English-speaking divers hanging off its side. They were diving with a group of divers and had found a diver on the reef, unresponsive, not breathing, and she had no regulator in her mouth. Her BCD inflator hose was disconnected, and they were unable to reconnect it. Evidently, she had 'loads of air' in her tank.

"It later became clear that the regulator [direct feed hose] and BCD were not compatible. They could not raise the diver, and so, surfaced and

Coral Cuts Can Be Costly

Ken Kurtis of Reef Seekers (Beverly Hills, CA) tells us the sobering tale of one of his divers who suffered a minor coral cut or some such while diving in the Indo-Pacific region.

"No big deal, and it probably happens to just about everyone on every trip, and nothing comes of it. However, in his case, it somehow turned into a staph infection. Although these can be fairly mild, some are known as MRSA (basically, they're resistant to antibiotics), and this may have been what he picked up. He spent 18 days hospitalized and is still somewhat weak, but recovering. The good news is that he has medical insurance. But the bad news is that it wasn't going to cover everything, and his total bill before insurance was \$750,000."

Yes, you read that right! Three-quarters of a million dollars!

Undercurrent's senior editor, John Bantin, had a similar experience in 1999, with what initially appeared to

be an inconsequential coral abrasion but which turned nasty. Luckily he benefitted from the British National Health System, and treatment in the hospital didn't cost him a penny. Nevertheless, it was so serious he was lucky not to lose a leg.

Kurtis goes on, "This is where DAN comes in, because, as a secondary insurer, they picked up a lot of what his primary insurance didn't cover. So while he had to pay a little bit, he doesn't have to file for bankruptcy just because a small cut got infected. So bear in mind that your DAN insurance policy can be very valuable to you when traveling, even if you're not on a diving vacation. The main caveat is that the injury has to occur at least 50 miles from your home. But it bears remembering that it's an inexpensive insurance arsenal, and if you don't have DAN insurance, you should join DAN and get signed up today." (<http://www.diversalertnetwork.org/insurance>)

called for help. As the dive boat that had found them needed to pick up its own divers, we picked up the couple and took them back to their boat. My impressions are that they were experienced divers and very shaken by the incident.

“The two Deep Blue boats then set up a surface search carried out by the divemaster from the other boat. He located the diver after 10 minutes, and then the two divemasters marked the spot using an SMB and a weight. As they were doing this, the dead diver’s boat finally arrived on the scene. Apparently, they had dropped a party of three divers, including the deceased, with a divemaster at one part of the reef and then a second group of two and a second divemaster, elsewhere on the reef.

“From talking to the two young ladies from the deceased’s group, it transpired that she had aborted her dive and surfaced. They are probably the only people who know whether she surfaced alone or with a divemaster, whether she got to the surface and whether she took an SMB. We took the rest of the deceased’s party back to shore near Palancar, while the two divemasters from her boat recovered her body.”

It may be that upon surfacing, Schmitz was unable to inflate her BC orally. She might have been carrying too much lead. She certainly did not drop her weights. She might have been suffering from some debilitating health problem. We will never know.

There are unconfirmed reports that the casualty suffered a heart attack or stroke. However, that might have been as a result of the struggle to stay afloat. Whatever it was, she was alone and eventually dropped and drowned. Nobody would have seen her go. It’s an indictment of group diving where there are no specific buddy pairs.

We don’t know whether she was assigned a buddy, or, if she were, whether the buddy was expected to surface with her. Although it’s irritating for many divers to be assigned an impromptu buddy, had one surfaced with Schmitz, it might possibly have avoided a tragic ending.

Because of the reluctance of many people to talk with us, we think there may be more to the story. We’ll follow up, if we can.

The Pros and Cons of Shark-Feeding Dives

our readers respond

Last month *Undercurrent* asked, “Should the attraction of sharks by either baiting or feeding, for the benefit of viewing divers in U.S. waters, be banned?”

Among the responses, the number was divided between 58 percent who said “yes, ban it” and 42 percent who said “no.” But, it’s not a simple issue, and if the U.S. ban were to go through, one would only have to travel no farther than the Bahamas to join a shark feed.

Our readers make many interesting points regarding shark feeding, so we’ll discuss the issue, using their points to illustrate why it is successful and why many divers don’t like it.

Is Shark Feeding the Only Way to Get Close to Sharks?

Sharks fascinate people, especially divers, and the video clips featuring sharks on the *Undercurrent* Facebook page are the most popular. One of a shark

encounter at Tiger Beach in the Bahamas reached 17,000 people.

Sharks spend their time mating, feeding on carrion, or hunting live prey. They tend to be elusive, preferring to surf on strong currents. Nearly every time you see a dramatic picture of a shark, it’s been lured in by bait, either a scent trail or actual dead fish.

Probably the only exception, other than seeing reef sharks, is the brief encounters one might have with oceanic white tip sharks. These roam the oceans, generally staying shallow, investigating anything that is potentially a meal. If they see a diver in the water, they move in for a close assessment. There is no bait as such. The diver is the bait! And, thankfully, the oceanics take a pass.

Dave Kinney (Vienna, VA) quite rightly says that without food in the water, most species of sharks won’t come close to divers. For example, divers only get fleeting encounters with tiger sharks at Cocos

Island, but at Tiger Beach, off Grand Bahama, where the tigers are fed by some operators, the encounters are face-to-face. (See the review in our March issue.)

Helen Mainar (Tampa, FL) agrees that feeding

“Get past the assumption that feeding sharks leads to attacks.”

[or baiting] is one of the few ways to observe sharks close-up. She wishes “every human could get into the water to observe these majestic animals. Perhaps it would curtail our world-wide harvesting of these predators to the point of extinction.”

Linda Blanchard (Mission Viejo, CA) says the pictures she has made at scores of shark feed dives have helped nondivers understand that sharks are not the vicious animals people have been led to believe. “What we need to ban is shark fishing.”

Greg Honore (Brea, CA) says he is not a fan of hand-feeding, but good education along with the fun of diving with sharks can only help shark survival.

Shark feeding is “an amazing experience when done correctly,” says Clev Wallace (Penn Valley, CA) after three trips to Tiger Beach, where a scent trail on the current is usually effective enough. It’s done differently by the French, in Polynesia, where

they actually feed the sharks. Tom Lopatin (Lake Hopatcong, NJ) says some of the most exciting dives he’s experienced (in the North Coral Sea and Rangiroa) were a result of shark feeding, while Jeff Tutin (Nottingham, UK) says he’s enjoyed many close encounters in Cuba. No doubt, organized shark feeding attracts the diving tourists.

Jim Hart (New Orleans, LA), who has worked worldwide in oceanographic research for 25 years, makes an important point. “The opportunities we had to study shark behavior and biology were unique and very useful. The shark-feeding operations not only provided useful scientific information, but allowed thousands of divers to learn through personal experience the true nature and beauty of the species. Worldwide, there has been no evidence that these shark encounters have any negative impact on swimmers or the environment.”

Is it Good for Local People?

As do many *Undercurrent* subscribers, Catriona Steele (Honiara, Solomon Islands) prefers to see sharks naturally, but understands and appreciates the economic value of the tourist dollar. Shark feed dives such as those in Beqa Lagoon, Fiji, do add to the local economy, because they attract a lot more paying divers than just reef diving alone.

Adam Hanlon, a British underwater photographer managing wetpixel.com, says, “Shark ecotourism can be a powerful force for good. For it to work,

Does Human Interaction Affect Shark Behavior?

Researchers from the University of California (Santa Barbara) Marine Science Institute wanted to find out, so they went to Palmyra, a remote atoll in the central Pacific Ocean, where shark populations are healthy, fishing is not allowed, and its near pristine underwater world is rarely dived. It is home to a small scientific research station, where researchers dive in a handful of locations. This makes the atoll an ideal site for studying whether and how shark abundance and behavior differs between locations where diving is more common and those where it is not.

The team studied whether scuba-diving activities have long-term consequences for shark populations. They used baited remote underwater video systems — cameras lowered to the ocean floor with a small amount of bait — to survey sharks and other predators from the surrounding reef.

“After reviewing 80 hours of underwater footage taken from video surveys conducted in 2015, 14 years

after Palmyra was established as a wildlife refuge and scientific diving activities began, we found that shark abundance and shark behavior were the same at sites with and without a long history of scuba diving,” said co-author Jennifer Caselle, a research biologist.

“Unfortunately, human impacts on shark populations are ubiquitous on our planet,” said lead author Darcy Bradley, a postdoctoral researcher at UCSB’s Bren School of Environmental Science & Management. “That makes it difficult to separate shark behavioral changes due to scuba diving from behavioral changes caused by other human activities like fishing.”

“Our results suggest that humans can interact with reef sharks without long-term behavioral impacts. That’s good news. It means that well-regulated shark-diving tourism doesn’t necessarily undermine shark conservation goals.”

(Source: *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 2017)

though, local residents have to see the tangible benefit to protecting rather than fishing for sharks.” Unfortunately, the economic return of the international shark fin trade encourages locals to slaughter sharks for a quick buck.

Worth More Alive than Dead

Margo Peyton (Columbia, SC), who runs Kids Sea Camp, points out that giving living sharks a monetary value helps shield them from the shark-finning industry. Long time diving industry leader, Peter Hughes, suggests that “the close-up and personal experiences possible through shark dives go a long way to educating people and will hopefully slow down the complete decimation of the world’s shark population.”

A new scientific study commissioned by the nonprofit organization Oceana has found that live sharks in Florida’s waters are worth about 200 times more than dead ones. *Undercurrent* is unclear if that is due, in part, to those currently illegal shark dives. The study is the first of its kind in the U.S. to try to calculate what conservationists have long argued about many imperiled fish: they’re worth far less on a plate than they are in the water.

Shark dives are big business in an industry where some struggle to make a living. The *Miami Herald* reports that wildlife consultant Tony Fedler contacted 365 dive operators across the state and got responses from 237. He found that nearly one-third of the divers look for trips where they’ll likely spot sharks; one in five specifically look for encounters with sharks. So shark dives are here to stay, if not in U.S. waters.

That’s because of guys like John L. Russell (Orlando, FL), who originated the campaign to ban shark feeding in U.S. waters. He says, “Commodifying [sic] and entrainment [sic] of wild-life is animal abuse — not conservation.”

Is Shark Feeding Dangerous for People in the Water?

Many divers who oppose shark-feeding are concerned about safety. Rob Black (Miami, FL) suggests, “It is foolishly dangerous to attract large sharks to divers. Sooner or later, some tourist is going to get bitten.”

“If sharks get used to being fed by divers, they will lose their fear and become dangerous to other divers,” Joe (no last name) of Jupiter, FL, believes. It’s Jupiter where Randy Jordan and Emerald Charters operate, and many from Jupiter responded to our survey. Miriam Ruffolo says, “Shark behavior has changed. They are coming closer to people with

Shark Dives Operating in The Bahamas:

Stuart Cove’s Dive the Bahamas

www.stuartcove.com

Dolphin Dream dolphindreamteam.com

Big Fish Expeditions bigfishexpeditions.com

Bahamas Aggressor aggressor.com

Epic Diving epicdiving.com

Neal Watson’s Undersea Adventures

nealwatson.com

Jim Abernethy’ Scuba Adventures

scuba-adventures.com

Aqua Cat allstarliveboards.com/aquacat

Other Locations Known for Shark Dives:

Cuba (Jardines de la Reina)

Fiji (Beqa Lagoon)

French Polynesia (Tua Motus)

Australia (North Coral Sea)

Mexico (Guadalupe Island)

USA (Southern California)

USA (embarking Jupiter and Lake Park, FL)

GoPros on sticks,” and Lester Maloon, with over 600 dives off Jupiter, says shark behavior had “changed due to feeding. A very bad idea.” Karni Kissil said, “Food increases chances for unpleasant interactions.”

Balance these against Terri Roberts, who dives three to five days a week off Jupiter (FL), and says, “Sharks desperately need to have divers to understand why their conservation is of utmost [importance].”

Sandra Carlson-Wood (Port Saint Lucie, FL) is sure that sharks have become more aggressive because they check out divers to see if they have food. But, are they being aggressive just because they come close, or just less fearful of humans and more curious or assertive? Jay Tarr (Spring Hill, FL) suggests, “Once sharks associate humans and food, the outcome isn’t good.”

Yet few people get injured by sharks while scuba diving. Richard L. (Hopkinsville, KY) says, “Get past the assumption that feeding sharks leads to [shark]

Download the Responsible Shark and Ray Tourism Guide

Love 'em or hate 'em, with about 400 shark and ray interaction operations operating around the world — and with that number set to double within two decades — it's been estimated to generate more than \$780 million. Conservation organizations such as PADI's Project Aware, the World Wildlife Fund, and the Manta Trust have combined to produce a practical guide for operators.

Responsible Shark and Ray Tourism: a Guide to best Practice has been designed to help operators, NGOs, and local communities to develop and maintain well-managed operations.

“Shark- and ray-focused eco-tourism has a great potential as a conservation strategy,” said Dr. Andy Cornish of the WWF. “We sought advice from scientists and the industry to help bridge the gap and deliver a best-practice guide,” added Isabel Ender of the Manta Trust.

It consists of a suite of tools, including posters, scorecards, and checklists and can be downloaded free from the websites of www.projectaware.org www.panda.org or the www.mantatrust.org.

attacks and look for real evidence it's an issue.” He believes you'll find it lacking. From what we know, the numbers don't stack up, as Richard says.

Frederica Gamble (New York, NY) said she had joined several shark feeds in the Pacific and saw nothing that would concern her since “the feeds were organized in a safe and professional manner.”

It is true, however, that an operation that spears fish for the benefit of sharks during a dive is asking for trouble. Ray Brown (Citrus Heights, CA) said, “I have been to shark feeds in the Western Pacific where I was surprised that a spectator has not been killed.” Is that because the French (in French Polynesia) are cavalier about the way they do it?

But, keep in mind, as Ellen Smith (Minneapolis, MN) says, that if you think shark feeding may be dangerous, you can choose not to participate. Russell Worman (Lynnwood, WA) says, “Diving with sharks should be a choice. There's no evidence that feeding sharks to attract them to dive sites increases the risk. If that were the case, why aren't there more shark attacks by the species being fed off Jupiter (FL)?”

Furthermore, there's no evidence that other swimmers or snorkelers are more likely to get bitten by a shark in the Bahamas, where there are a lot more shark feeding dives than anywhere else.

Does Shark Feed Make the Sharks More Vulnerable?

It's not always the wellbeing of people that's a worry for some people. A shark bite can bring retribution in the form of a cull to a shark population, as seen in Western Australia and other places in recent years.

“It's putting sharks in danger, because if they bite or kill a human as a result of feeding, they will be

punished [killed], as happened in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt,” says Jan T. (Bristol, UK).

Barbara Becker (Melville, NY) speculates that feeding will cause sharks to come closer inshore, making them more vulnerable. “Many sharks are already endangered. We don't need to add fuel to the fire!”

Drawing struggling fish ashore by angling rings the dinner bell for sharks, risking accidental bites for those sharing the water with fishermen. Ken Scarborough (Vero Beach, FL) opines, “Fishing from shore should be banned. That is what brings sharks to the shoreline.”

J. Offner (Clearwater Beach, FL) makes the different yet equally valid point that if it changes the behavior of sharks, it might make them more vulnerable to unscrupulous fishing charters that know where shark dive boats go. In fact, in the 1980s, Bahamas fishermen wiped out a couple of dozen sharks that the dive operation at Stella Maris fed for their divers.

However, at times, some sharks are rescued by divers. Stuart Kadow (Riviera Beach, FL) comments, “Randy Jordan removes hooks from injured sharks and helps stop the ‘Jaws’ myth.” Jim Abernethy and Cristina Zenato do the same in the Bahamas. Take a look at this recent news: <http://tinyurl.com/ln5lerx> and this news, also recent, from Cat Island, Bahamas: <http://tinyurl.com/lqqf3xk>

Is it the Same as Feeding any Other Wild Animals?

Diving with sharks is an emotive subject. We've been conditioned by a generation of sensational media stories to view them as unselective predators

— all man-eaters (woman, too). Consequently, some say “You wouldn’t attempt to walk among lions, would you?” Henry Ziller (Conifer, CO) asks, “Why should underwater be any different to being on land?” John Maiers (Solomons, MD) says you should

Rule #1 when attending a shark feed dive is to let someone else do the feeding!

not feed any wild animal, a popular view among many wildlife aficionados, while Emily (FL) says any manipulation of a species is disrespectful.

Lions are terrestrial animals, and so are we. They know exactly what to do when they see a baboon — and, of course, we remind them of baboons, as we have for millions of years. And while sharks have been around for 400 million years, we have only been diving with them for less than 60 years. The truth is that sharks don’t know what to make of us, so they tend to ignore us. That’s good. After all, they are wild animals and have rows of exceedingly sharp teeth.

How Often Do People Get Bitten?

People rarely get bitten by sharks, but when they do, it’s inevitably because they were close to something the shark was trying to eat. That said, a severe bite while underwater can be disastrous, regardless of the shark’s intent. David Cutler (Idaho Falls, ID)

only witnessed a shark feed once, but said, “It was pure pandemonium. People have no idea how fast these creatures can move.” Yet George Constantino (Anchorage, AK) thought it “Well worth the risk.” It’s all a matter of perspective.

Sharks live a long time and try not to get damaged in the process of feeding. Their eyes are their vulnerability, so they have evolved a nictitating eyelid that covers their eyes when they go in for that bite. So, effectively, they feed with their eyes shut.

If you are holding a bit of dead fish (something they have evolved to clean up, otherwise the sea would be rotten with dead animals), there’s a chance you might be bitten in error as the shark grabs and swallows it. So rule #1 when attending a shark feed dive is to let someone else do the feeding!

What They Are Eating Makes a Difference.

There’s a big difference between sharks feeding on carrion and hunting live prey. In the first case, there is no urgency, and the animals take care not to compete with each other, thereby risking damage to themselves. Smaller sharks defer to larger, more dominant animals, in what is almost a leisurely process. Compare that to when they hunt live prey. It’s not a time to be in the water with competing sharks.

Edward Leibowitz (Jersey City, NJ) told us, “Sharks become too aggressive when feeding from bait balls, [whereas] I have been on shark feeds in

Great White Sharks are Back in Florida and You Can Track Them

Great white shark sightings off the East coast of Florida are fairly uncommon. These sharks spend their time in the cooler waters farther north, where they feed on seals and scavenge whale carcasses. However, as reported in the February issue of *Undercurrent*, a small group of divers encountered an estimated 14-foot (3.5m) long specimen in the waters off Juno Beach. It was the third such sighting in less than a month.

To learn more about the migratory habits of sharks using satellite technology, OCEARCH, a white shark research and advocacy team, tagged a shark they named Katherine in the coastal waters of Cape Cod back in 2013. Then she was 14 feet (3.5m) long and weighed 2300 pounds (more than 1000kg). On the last Sunday of January, her tracking device revealed she was off the coast of West Palm Beach.

She previously visited the Treasure Coast in 2014, checking out Sebastian Inlet, The Monster Hole,

Bethel Shoals, St. Lucie Inlet, The Sand Hill, and later, Boynton Beach. A half-eaten blacktip shark washed up on New Smyrna Beach at the end of February gave rise to speculation that this was the work of Katherine.

Another similar size white shark, named Lydia, was tagged off the coast of Florida in 2013 and four years later she had traveled 36,000 miles throughout the northwestern Atlantic and even, uniquely, crossed the mid-Atlantic ridge. The motives behind her odyssey are enigmatic.

You can get real-time tracking of dozens of tagged great white sharks by going to www.ocearch.org and clicking on a shark of your choice. You’ll be amazed to see their routes in the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, as they meander through the temperate waters along the coastal eastern states and occasionally into warmer waters further south.

the Bahamas and did not have any encounters with aggressive sharks.”

British diver Tony White (Swindon, UK) would agree. He was severely bitten in 2002 by getting too close to a bait ball with feeding sharks during the Sardine Run in South Africa.

Bob Morris (Wayne, PA), who has attended staged shark-feed dives in the Bahamas, Fiji, and off of Jupiter, FL, believes that when sharks are fed [carion], they have no interest in the divers. “That said, when you dive with sharks, you accept that there is [always] the potential of getting bitten.” He advises, “Watch the shark’s behavior and always keep aware of what is behind as well as in front.”

Several readers believe that baiting makes the critters more aggressive; however, that may very well betray an innate personal fear of sharks. How does one know the shark is aggressive if it doesn’t actually attack? They may be curious and assertive, but that is not aggression.

Liz Parkinson, representing Stuart Cove’s Dive the Bahamas, probably the busiest shark diving operation on the planet, tells *Undercurrent*, “Over the past 30 years, about 1.475 million people have dived with sharks. Two guests have been bitten, both on the hand, because they did not listen to the briefing and reached out to touch the sharks. They were both fine.”

Do Sharks Go Crazy When They Sense Blood In The Water?

When a young Michelle Cove, feeding without the protection of a chainmail suit nor helmet, unwisely thrust her head into a mob of sharks voraciously

grabbing what they could from a spilled bait box, she was effectively scalped. When she climbed back on board, her dive boat captain nearly fainted, there was so much gore. However, there had been no feeding frenzy. Michelle had disappeared in a cloud of her own blood. Those 400 million years of evolution had not told the sharks this strange-tasting liquid indicated a good meal.

Still, getting badly bitten underwater can lead to a fatal blood loss. Mike Neumann, owner of Beqa Adventure Divers, a well-known shark diving operation in Fiji, says, “Sharks have a mouth full of very sharp teeth, and if you want to get close to them, you should be aware of that.”

I once saw a diver with poor buoyancy control involuntarily make a sudden hand movement and inadvertently thrust his hand into a passing shark’s mouth, resulting in a bloody mess. The shark continued on, oblivious.

What’s the conclusion?

I certainly don’t approve of amateur divers attempting to hand-feed sharks, and would prefer the scent-trail method to tempt the sharks, for species with which that works, rather than giving the sharks food. And, I clearly know that many people just don’t like the notion of shark feeding on philosophical grounds and would share the view of Helen Sykes (Fiji): “It is an ethical and ecological disaster.”

If you don’t approve of shark-feed dives for any reason, simply vote with your feet and boycott those operations that do it.

— John Bantin, Sr. Editor
Author, Shark Bytes

Faulty Gear or Bad Judgment?

tragedies that might have been handled differently

When fit and experienced Canadian diver Allen McGuire, 53, apparently drowned during a dive while on a February vacation in the Dominican Republic, it was left to another Canadian tourist to tell his partner, Luanna Cappuccino, that he was found unresponsive in the water and other divers had tried to resuscitate him.

Unable to get a full autopsy report, she was informed by a doctor that he had “died from

asphyxiation.” She has been struggling to get a satisfactory explanation of what happened from officials, and the dive company, Scubaquatic, didn’t even speak to her, leaving her with questions about whether the company had proper equipment and adequately trained instructors.

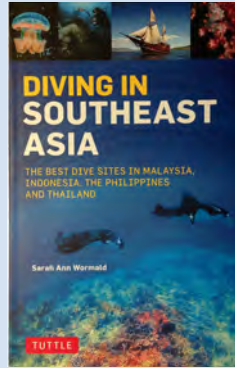
“It wasn’t a heart attack,” she says. “There’s no sign of stress, so it’s not like something like that has happened.”

A Pocket Guide for Diving in Southeast Asia

There was a time when every American diver automatically headed to the Caribbean, but more recently the lure of the burgeoning marine life, the colorful corals and the inexpensive cost of living of Southeast Asia is drawing more divers to Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines.

But where to go? Researching the files of *Undercurrent* will tell you just about all you need to know, but consider Sarah Ann Wormald's *Diving in Southeast Asia* as a fine supplement all in one volume. After two decades diving and eight years exploring the Indonesian archipelago, she offers the honest appraisal of someone who's been there, and although some of the descriptions are necessarily brief in her pocket-sized volume, nearly all the dive sites you might want to visit are covered.

The Philippines alone has more coastline than many larger countries, thanks to the sheer number of islands. The Indonesian archipelago stretches nearly 3000 miles from west to east (although this book starts at Indonesia's East Kalimantan). The Burma Banks in Myanmar/Thailand are as far west as this book covers



and West Papua as far east.

Diving in Southeast Asia provides a useful starting point for planning a trip. It provides maps spotting the locations of sites and brief tabulated summaries for quick reference. Every page is adorned with a colorful picture generally taken underwater. From marine life suitable for super-macro cameras to WWII wrecks draped in corals, from whale sharks to pigmy seahorses, it's all covered.

This book also provides a comprehensive section that deals with practicalities such as ways of getting there, where to stay, what to eat and who to dive with. The list of contributors to the text is a veritable Who's Who of experts on Asian diving.

There are many similarly named books. *Diving in Southeast Asia* is 288 pages available in soft cover and will soon be available in

Kindle format.

Listed at \$19.95, order through *Undercurrent* by clicking [here](#) and you'll get Amazon's best price — and we'll get a small commission that we'll donate to further the health of coral reefs.

Cappuccino said the Dominican Republic national police told her they would not open an investigation until they received an Attorney General's report, which would follow the coroner's report in about three months. She says if a diver had died in similar circumstances in Canada, the company's equipment would be checked right away. That hasn't happened, and Scubaquatic continues to operate.

The Canadian federal department warns that beach and sporting equipment, especially scuba diving equipment, in the Dominican Republic may not meet Canadian safety standards.

The bereaved family of any diver who dies always wants someone to blame. It's only natural. And they'll always want tougher regulations to prevent further fatalities.

Timothy Chu, a Hong Kong-born British police officer, 27, set up a dive trip with Ogden Point Dive Center in British Columbia. He had a mere 14 dives logged when he went for that last open water dive on July 5, 2015. He lost his life at Race Rocks near Victoria, in an area notorious for its strong currents.

The family held an emotional press conference

in January this year. His father, Bill Chu, said the dive shop should not have taken a person with such limited experience into the area due to the high risk, especially since two other diving accidents had recently happened in the same area. Search and Rescue crew got two other divers, who allegedly were with the Ogden Point Dive Center, to safety.

Although Timothy Chu had sensibly hired a local divemaster as a buddy, there remains a question mark over the divemaster's qualifications. During the court hearing, the Coroner deduced Chu encountered conditions that overwhelmed his experience and training. Because of tides, the site is normally only dived at slack water, but local divers know the currents are unpredictable. The Coroner also noted that once he encountered difficulty, he consumed more air from his tank, resulting in the divemaster attempting to supply Chu with air from his own regulator. Fighting a heavy current and getting tangled in the kelp, Chu was pulled down, suggesting he wore too much weight, a common practice with inexperienced divers. His body was found more than a month later.

(Sources: CBC, The Ottawa Citizen and the Vancouver Sun)

Woes Aboard the *Sri Lanka Aggressor*

and it's out of business

In January we told the sorry tale of Michael Jöst, who planned to travel with the newly converted *Sri Lanka Aggressor* over Christmas, only to have the Aggressor Fleets cancel the trip as he departed his home in Germany. Because he had made additional ground reservations, he traveled anyhow, though the boat was out of commission. The Aggressor Fleet

They washed regulators in the rinse tank without dust caps in place.

told him it was due to maintenance issues. While there, he learned there were permit issues, and, as we learned from a newspaper report, the vessel did not meet local regulations, and the government prevented it from sailing. The Aggressor did refund his or other passengers' money.

In March, we were surprised to receive several disturbing messages from divers who were on board the *Sri Lanka Aggressor* during February, each story corroborating the next. Most of those who wrote prefer to remain anonymous at this stage.

Apparently, the first week of the charter was inauspicious: This so-called new boat was at least 10 years old, not new, as advertised. Divers reported it in poor condition, with no air conditioning for several days, and toilets that didn't flush. Some bathrooms smelled of sewage so badly that at least one passenger, Allahna Davis, told us that said she preferred not to use her shower.

The water maker apparently stopped working, so that fresh water needed to be conserved. Many cabin doors did not shut properly. Some divers felt that the design of the boat seemed inappropriate for diving. For example, the ornate ball caps on the newel posts on the stairway to the dive platform broke off as fully equipped divers grabbed on to steady themselves. The exposed metal spikes had to be wrapped with dinner napkins.

Some food supplies ran out, there was no consideration for special diets, and one diver said the food was inedible. It was difficult to get anything corrected because of the language barrier between passengers and the mostly Egyptian crew, which also

seemed to be untrained in diving matters. For example, they washed regulators in the rinse tank without dust caps in place.

All week, only one inflatable boat functioned. The promised nitrox was never available. The undersea terrain was a desert, the result of generations of trawling, with no coral reefs to speak of. Sri Lanka is mountainous, and huge, murky rivers dump into the ocean, creating poor visibility. On the very first dive, one diver surfaced early because there was nothing to see. Even a cursory glance at the view on Google Earth reveals few topographical features under water.

Because there were few, if any, safe anchorages (and no offshore islands) to give shelter from the Indian Ocean swell, the anchor line broke three times during one week, so the vessel stayed within reach of Colombo. There are a few wrecks near Colombo, but they were so deep that dives lasted 20 minutes. Abandoned fishing nets were strewn about the wrecks.

A Blue-Fingered Diver in Warm Waters

Raynaud's phenomenon is a well-known consequence of exposure to extreme cold. Blood vessels constrict, and the fingers go blue. Constriction for too long is akin to frostbite, which can have severe consequences.

It's unusual to think of the ocean around Florida as sufficiently cold to cause it, but an un-named 18-year-old male, who made four dives to around 90 feet (27m) over two days, noticed a painless blue discoloration on three fingers of his left hand. It resolved within an hour of surfacing. During a medical examination one week later, everything appeared normal until medical tests showed blood flow was severely diminished in all digits of both hands when they were cooled. Since other causes were ruled out, the diver's blue fingers remained a mystery.

The doctors advised him to dive with gloves and a drysuit, wetsuit, or heated vest, even in tropical waters.

(Abridged from: *Cable R, Weaver LK, Roberts AB, et al UHMS 2016, Vol 43, No7*)

PADI, from \$200K to \$700,000K in 32 Years

In 1983, PADI was a nonprofit California corporation, whose directors were John Cronin and Craig Carlson (they founded it in Chicago in 1966), and Ralph Erickson. PADI instructors were the members and allegedly had voting rights in what was the instructional and certifying Professional Association of Diving Instructors.

However, the three had also created another PADI — International PADI — as a for-profit organization, and this was the marketing-oriented PADI that was about to catch a wave in the expanding international market. Cronin, Carlson, and Erickson were the majority board members of International PADI as well, joined by Al Ormsby and Gary Prevnost.

In 1983, Cronin, Carlson and Erickson sold PADI to International PADI for \$200,000, and that led to several instructors filing a major lawsuit on the grounds that as PADI members, they had not been allowed to vote, and, in fact, PADI had not even been holding elections for board membership, as their bylaws required.

It was a complicated lawsuit, charging PADI with becoming a commercial venture by shortening courses, lowering training standards, and not living up to its

own objectives. But, the suit also charged self-dealing, arguing that by selling PADI, which the three PADI board members — Cronin, Carlson and Erickson — controlled, they stood to profit illegally and that the move was designed to enrich them at the expense of the nonprofit organization. The instructors argued the move was against PADI bylaws, and in violation of state and federal law. It was a strong argument.

But, Cronin and Company lawyered up, opened its checkbook, and went to work, papering the instructors and their overwhelmed and underfunded legal team. The litigants had shallow pockets, eventually ran out of money, and their suit petered out.

Since then, PADI has been sold many times, and a lot of people, including the original founders, have made a lot of money. In late March, it sold once again, this time for \$700 million to Mandarin Holdings, a group composed mainly of wealthy Chinese families and endowments. Matt Jarezensky, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, says they purchased PADI from Providence Equity Partners, which had purchased it just two years ago, helped it expand in China, and has now tripled its investment.

One group of divers booked the trip through Blue Water Travel, which did all it could to mitigate the problems onboard with David Home, who was said to be the general manager.

A second week was devoted to whale watching instead of scuba diving, as planned, but only one group of passengers in the two inflatable boats actually got to see a whale. The passengers became upset to learn that they did not have permission to snorkel with the whales near Marissa, from where whale-watching boats depart daily. For compensation, the crew took the passengers to a remote beach. One inflatable boat, apparently overloaded with 16 passengers, took a high wave over the aft about 100 feet (30m) from shore, and overturned, launching all the passengers, their gear and cameras into the water.

During the ensuing chaos, one female passenger had her head gashed, while another, an American man named Marshall, was trapped underneath the upturned boat, and a severe impact almost completely severed his ear. Disoriented, he was dragged clear and made it to the beach, where he used a held a wet towel to his head, the only treatment available, to staunch the bleeding. There was a doc-

tor or two among the passengers who might have been able to help once back on the mother craft, but the incomplete medical kit had no sutures. Nor was the *Sri Lanka Aggressor's* satellite phone operational.

It took eight hours to get into a suitable port, which was not the operational port of the vessel, so bureaucratic problems persisted. After visiting a primitive local clinic, Marshall decided to make the six-and-a-half hour journey to Colombo, where he had reconstructive surgery on the now detached ear with 55 micro-sutures. He was left with multiple hematomas and disfigurement.

The story continues, and no doubt litigation is in the future. Despite the trip being curtailed, some passengers are encountering difficulty in claiming a refund from their travel insurance policies, because cancellation due to an injury to another passenger is not covered. Three passengers who had booked consecutive weeks told *Undercurrent* that David Home said he was suggesting Aggressor Fleet gave them only a \$500 voucher in recompense for the failed air-conditioning. He asked why, if the boat was so bad, they had continued on it for the second week!

Most of our informants prefer *Undercurrent* not to publish their full names, at the time of writing, for fear it inhibits their claims for compensation.

The Aggressor Fleet has since issued this curious notice, which reads as if the *Sri Lanka Aggressor* management decided to resign from the fleet, but the Fleet itself is taking no issue with them.

“The *Sri Lanka Aggressor* has faced numerous challenges on several fronts, and the franchise owners have concluded that they will not be able to deliver consistently the Aggressor experience that our guests have come to expect. Today, we have been notified by the owners that the *Sri Lanka Aggressor* yacht will cease operations effective March 11th, 2017.”

Problems with Braided Regulator Hoses

an alert from DAN

While most of our subscribers are members of DAN, and therefore, receive their magazine, *Alert Diver*, we think it’s important to call attention to a recent story (winter 2017 edition) that points out a potential problem with the lightweight, flexible hoses that have replaced the old, standard, rubber-covered regulator hoses. They are so flexible, they can be tied in knots!

DAN has reported a regulator failure that was caused by this type of hose becoming restricted in such a way that for the diver, it seemed as if he was out of air; however, the tank was not empty. The inside of the braided hose had become blocked with a polymorphic crystallization related to the molecular structure of the internal tube — a phenomenon associated with cyclical heating and cooling.

It seems that the sun may heat up the hose, and when the tank valve is opened, the flow of depressurized air then cools it rapidly. This happens before every dive, causing tiny crystals to form and accumulate over time. As they grow, these crystals



can either block the hose or migrate into the second-stage, resulting in a significant failure.

The incidence of failure is quite small. However, because this occurs internally, it is not visible to a diver looking at the hose, so the deteriorated internal surfaces go unnoticed. That means divers should periodically examine these hoses by squeezing them every inch or so along their length to assess whether they exhibit the same degree of flexibility. Any change in resistance would be a sign of an impending problem.

If you’re diving in hot tropical climates, you need to know that DAN believes these hoses have a limited functional life, because the internal surfaces appear to be prone to this crystallization in hot weather. If you notice any gas-flow restriction, cease using your regulator.

To better understand the phenomenon, DAN wants more information. If you observe this degradation in your regular hose, please contact DAN, preferably with pictures showing the condition of the hose. research@dan.org

Flotsam & Jetsam

There are Two Types of Divers: Those who pee in their suits and those who tell lies about it, hence the common aura encountered on dive decks. Regardless of your standing, if you’re one who likes to jump in the resort swimming pool in your wetsuit after a dive, you may wish to know that a research team testing 31 pools and hot tubs in Canada found evidence of urine in every single one

of them. *Environmental Science and Technology Letters* reports that they found an average of eight gallons of urine in a typical 110,000-gallon pool. As for hot tubs — you don’t want to know. While urine may not be harmful, it can react with chlorine to create by-products known as DBPs that can lead to eye and respiratory irritation.

Cruelty to Nurses. People are rightly outraged that nurse sharks are subjected to exploitation and abuse at a Mexican restaurant called Playa Tuburón on the Isla Mujeres, off the coast of Cancun.

Tourists are encouraged to go into a small enclosure where they can hold a normally nocturnal nurse shark out of the water, partially suffocating it, in order to be photographed with it. Sign the petition at change.org to encourage tourists to abstain from visiting the Isla Mujeres until the restaurant halts the abuse. <http://tinyurl.com/k5s4k6s>

Another Wreck Dive for Grenada? Already with perhaps the best wreck dive in the Caribbean — the 600-foot *Bianca C* — there may be another. The Grenada Coast Guard, in a heroic act on March 3, rescued the crew from the *MV Persia*, a small freighter that sank around nine miles off Port Salines. Peter Seupel of Aquanauts Grenada says that all they had to do was find it!

Scuba Boots Meet Main Street? For their latest collection, the fashion gurus at Prada have taken the typical wetsuit boot, redesigned it in several different brightly colored materials for the molded rubber sole, neoprene upper, zip and Velcro strap, and given it a \$500 price tag. By attempting to take wetsuit boots out of the sea and onto the street, will they lure the fashion-conscious to endure sweaty feet this summer?

Don't Worry about the Sharks... It's the Crocs You have to Watch Out For. On March 20th, the body of 35-year-old scuba diver Warren Hughes was found near Innisfall in north Queensland, Australia, after he had been attacked by a saltwater crocodile. The attack was the same weekend as an attack on a teenager who had swum in the Johnson River to impress a British girl. He escaped with a serious injury. Rangers later captured and killed a 15-foot (4m) crocodile, an unwitting victim of a silly teenage stunt.

Jacksonville Scuba Program Warning. It takes a lot for PADI to kick out an instructor, but the training agency sent an email in March to all its Florida

members notifying them that Scuba Lessons Jax owner Chris Conrad had been expelled for failure to adhere to PADI standards and conducting unethical business practices. Various trainees said they never received their PADI certification cards from the Arlington, FL, dive shop, despite paying nearly \$400. According to the Better Business Bureau of Northeast Florida, 180 people paid through Groupon to take scuba lessons with the company. Conrad is reported to have said that he switched to a different instructor affiliation. (Source: *News4Jax*)

Eating Plastic? Worried about those micro beads in your toothpaste and shampoo getting into oceans and being ingested by the animals? Well, if you eat seafood, you're ingesting up to 11,000 tiny pieces of plastic every year. Researchers from the University of Ghent in Belgium believe that micro plastics accumulate in humans over time and become a long-term health risk. If trends continue, by the end of the century, people who regularly eat seafood could be consuming 780,000 pieces of plastic a year, absorbing 4,000 of them from their digestive systems. It doesn't sound good. (Source: *The Telegraph*)

Captive dolphins on St. Lucia. Plans to open a dolphinarium on St. Lucia featuring captive dolphins have provoked an outcry, with 25,000 signing a petition saying that it would damage a treasured heritage site. Opponents of the scheme, which is championed by the prime minister, complain that it ignores public distaste for the confinement of marine mammals and could even harm tourism "There is overwhelming opposition . . . the public is listening, but I can't gauge the extent to which our government is listening," said Bishnu Tulsie, director of St. Lucia National Trust. "The prime minister has said that as far as he is concerned, the decision to go ahead with the dolphinarium has already been taken." (Source: *The Times*)

undercurrent

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