

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Paradise Taveuni, Taveuni Island, Fiji

coral and cultural paradise

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Dear Fellow Diver:

I have a confession to make – I've been late to the game in my appreciation for coral. But brothers and sisters, like Saul on the Biblical road to Damascus, I have seen the light, thanks to a recent pilgrimage to Fiji. There, in the Straits of Somosomo, off the island of Taveuni, in the nutrient-laden waters dispersed by hearty currents, the soft coral colors are so intense they appear to glow from within.

Ah yes, the words "Paradise Taveuni" took on a special meaning while I received a "welcome" foot massage from a demure Fijian woman named Beta after we arrived at the main building, which houses the bar, kitchen, open-air restaurant, and dive center. Beta's shy, friendly smile hinted nothing of Fiji's cannibal history (hand-carved souvenir brain forks and war clubs notwithstanding). The entire staff seemed to know all our first names from day one, greeting me with "bula" (hello) and always saying "thank you" (vinaka).

Our vale at the beautifully manicured, flower-laden 16-unit Paradise Taveuni Resort sported a shady front porch looking out to Vanua Levu across the Straits. My air-conditioned main room,



Paradise Princess dive boat



enclosed by screened opened windows and wooden jalousies, contained a firm king four-poster bed with mosquito netting, a couch, a coffee maker, a little refrigerator, and a separate bathroom. Tall walls of lava rock enclosed a large outdoor shower area with a small, lush garden, where I reveled in a hot shower while standing in a cool, pouring rain. The couch made do as my camera table, which I found more convenient than the five-station camera room in the dive center.

On the trip to our first dive on Rainbow Reef, dolphins played in our wake. The first day was not notable, except for occa-

sional splashes of color here and there and a school of barracuda. On the second dive at Dolphin Bay, a bright-yellow fang blenny, a slender little fish with an erect dorsal, would come close to look me over, then retreat into a tiny hole. A juvenile yellowtail coris, red with white saddles outlined in black, stood out against the bottom. After a delicious lunch that included wahoo spicy coconut milk soup, our third dive was at Vuna Reef, just off a rocky shore. A disk-shaped dot and dash butterflyfish played hard-to-get. A brown-bodied geometric chromodoris crawled quickly across the bottom, its lumpy white tubercles and greenish gills and rhinophores standing out. A nudibranch ("Baba's phyllidia," named after renowned Japanese sea-slug researcher Kikutaro Baba), resembling a cross between a knobby dog's chew toy and a crazy yellow massager, was impossible to miss. At the end of the day, my only responsibility was to rinse my wetsuit, cameras and anything I wanted to keep handy. Otherwise, the crew took care of all my gear.

The Endless Acquisitions of Scuba Businesses

Remember old favorite brands like U.S. Divers, Spirotechnique, Uwatec, Dacor, and Seaquest? They all got swallowed up in acquisitions along the way and eventually disappeared. There are fewer and fewer small businesses manufacturing diving equipment now.

American Underwater Products (Pelagic, Oceanic, Aeris, Hollis) brought up both the Prism rebreather business of Peter Readey and Kevin Gurr's Explorer rebreather business in recent years.

The Canadian drysuit company, White's, fell into bed with Scubapro for a while before becoming a company within Aqualung's remit.

Aqualung's parent company, the French gas giant Aire Liquide, bought the British brand, Apeks, and set it alongside its Aqualung brand — and now both have been sold and are trading independently.

Suunto became part of Amer Sports. HTM took Mares, and, most recently, the training agency SSI, under its control. Mares also absorbed the Belgian

rebreather manufacturer, rEvo, last year. And, as we reported in the last issue, even PADI has changed hands recently and appears to be no longer affiliated with any diving magazine. Is this in preparation for a tie-up with a manufacturer?

Now Huish Outdoors, already the owner of Atomic Aquatics, Bare, Stahlsac, Liquivision, Sharkskin and Zeagle (and marketing Suunto in North America), has purchased AUP brands Oceanic and Hollis. Bob Hollis previously sold the Pelagic computer division of AUP to Aqualung.

Some speculate that the rebreathers might still be manufactured and sold by Hollis Rebreathers as a separate company, to separate potential legal liability from the main group.

Perhaps the good news for consumers might be that one should be able to find all these brands at the same dive store — if it is one that does business with Huish Outdoors.

Each day the primitive beat of the log lali drum sounded breakfast. Starting with a white linen napkin laid in my lap, the rotating menu included eggs benedict, pancakes, omelets, muesli, fruit, and lamb sausage. Female staff wore pretty blue sarongs; males wore masculine brown. Most had flowers behind an ear: left ear noted married, right for unmarried. Lunch orders were taken at breakfast, dinner orders taken at lunch. My favorite lunches included a meaty lasagna, coconut milk chicken soup, and coconut-battered wahoo. The lamb shank for dinner was straight from New Zealand and done just right. While the lemongrass beef skewers were chewy, I had no complaints with a dinner menu that might

begin with a course of coconut- and coriander-spiced fish balls with a sweet chili jam and end with a coconut pancake topped with grated sweetened coconut encased in a minted crepe and drizzled with rich chocolate sauce. The dishes, developed by the resort's co-owner, Australian chef Allan Gortan, left me with a big "Wow" written across my lips.



No beach and a ten foot drop into the sea

Sharks Continue to be the Movie Villains

When it comes to the unmitigated terror of the ill-informed public movie-going audience, all the aliens and monsters of the universe pale into insignificance when compared to the scariness of a circling shark. This summer's offering in movie theaters will be director Johannes Roberts' *47 Meters Down*.

The script pits its main characters against blood-thirsty sharks when a cage dive in Mexico goes very wrong. Two sisters find themselves trapped in a shark cage at 153 feet (47m) deep with limited air supplies, and sharks circling. One is an experienced diver while the other is not — giving plenty of scope for freaking out. Actress Mandy Moore says that growing up in Florida and visiting the beach, she was terrified of going into the water for as long as she could remember.

Well, this new movie may scare your non-diving neighbors, and it's sure to give you added credibility when you show them those shark-feed videos you made or appeared in — but you might also consider *47 Meters Down* to be unadulterated trash!

Our second day of diving was typical: Fish Factory gave me travel-poster-like wide angle shots as Moorish idols and long-nose butterfly-fish swimming with schools of orange scalefin anthias over a backdrop of anemone, golden feather stars, and knobby, thick green tube coral. Our second dive was at Rainbow Gardens, a spectacular field of separate coral gardens, where yellow and red fan coral sitting on a field of red and pink soft coral looked arranged with a florist's eye.

That night, the log drum sounded happy hour at 5:30 p.m., when the dive crews and resort staff often played guitar and sang. After the sun set, one was cautioned to avoiding stepping on the ever-present poisonous cane toads.

After the first few days of diving, I wasn't disappointed by any means, but neither was I impressed by anything "over the top," especially

Paradise Taveuni, Taveuni Island, Fiji

Diving	★★★★★
Photography	★★★★★
Snorkeling	★★★
Accommodations	★★★★
Food.....	★★★★★
Service and attitude.....	★★★★★
Money's worth	★★★★★

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

Worldwide scale

were equipped with oxygen, life jackets, and cell phones. The stern-mounted boarding ladder on the Lady Paradise, which was squeezed between its two Yamahas, meant climbing aboard was tricky in the choppy seas that developed as a tropical depression approached. I preferred the side-mounted boarding ladders on our smaller boat, Paradise Princess.

One afternoon, our little craft pitched so roughly that I checked to see where the life vests were kept. It was November, the start of cyclone season (it runs through April). In 2016, Tropical Cyclone Winston had virtually wiped out the resort and its house reefs. Searching their souls and digging deep into their pocketbooks, the owners decided to rebuild. The thatched-roof bungalows had to have sheet metal roofs put on them after the reconstruction.

After making the 40-minute boat ride to Rainbow Reef or the 20-minute ride

on the sites we dove in the afternoons at Luna. One dive at Rainbow Reef was almost a waste, because the guides failed to brief us properly on the current and our expected behavior. Once we dropped to 90 feet, the regulator-tugging current was so strong that staying firm to take photographs was impossible. I gave up and just went with the flow, but couldn't enjoy the ride because beforehand we had not been told to do that, so I constantly tried to find a sheltered spot to wait for the group, which was hard work. The current tore a handheld camera from one of our divers, and that was the end of it.

But the diving got better and better as my 10-day stay flew by. About two-thirds of our group rode aboard Lady Paradise, the resort's stable and spacious 15-meter twin-outboard, fiberglass twin-hull that accommodates up to 22 divers. I was assigned to their 10-meter, twin-outboard, aluminum mono-hulled boat. Both

Retire in Margaritaville?

I doubt you have ever been on a dive boat without hearing *Margaritaville* and other Jimmy Buffett songs played mercilessly, probably leaving you with a Buffet brainworm.

However, if you are one for whom Jimmy's music rings your eternal-youth bell, then you might consider moving to *Latitude Margaritaville* in Daytona, Florida.

You see, he's partnered with Minto Communities, a development firm, to create a housing community for those aged "55 or better," where margaritas and chill vibes, along with beachfront access, live entertainment, lap pools, spas and more will be the menu of the day, not to mention margaritas. Opening in the summer of

2018, the 7,000 homes being built will range from the low \$200,000s to \$350,000.

Writer Eric Vilas-Boas says if you move in, "your literal job then becomes to kick back all day, every day, and ask yourself — with the studied conviction of a Buddhist monk — "What would Jimmy Buffett do?" Answer: Pour yourself something tall and strong. Take a lunch break that takes all afternoon.

No word yet if they'll offer diving, but if they do, sing along on the ride to the reef and wait till your last dive's done for your first margarita of the day.

— Ben Davison



Typical 'vale' accommodation

see the backscatter in my longer shots, thanks to the plankton and other creatures that nourished the coral. One of my dive companions – we dove as a very loose group – hovered, staring in front of his mask at a translucent creature with white zigzag bands, a tiny tail, and an eye-like protrusion on one side.

For lunch, both boats met at a little island off Rainbow Reef for a beach picnic. That day my spouse snorkeled with a guide, while I dove Storm Warning, an enormous circular array of Staghorn coral. On the trip back, we cracked the cooler loaded with soft drinks, Fiji Gold and Fiji Bitters beer, and an occasional can of rum and cola, which kept spirits high.

Before the tropical depression brought overcast, there were occasional clouds but lots of sunshine, low 80°F (26°C) topside, fairly flat seas, with water ranging from 78°F (25°C) to a balmy 85°F (29°C). I was glad to be wearing my five mil and hooded vest, but one day, when I forgot to bring them(!), I dove in my skin and a loaner beanie. I dove in with six pounds (2.5kg), but picked up a hunk of dead coral to stay down, and George loaned me an extra three pounds. In the light gear, I felt refreshingly alive, enjoying the flexibility and light feeling without as much lead.

One morning, as we motored along, large ripples on the water turned out to be three manta rays scooping up plankton; we swam with them for 30 minutes, and I caught great video with my new waterproof Olympus TG-4. My dive mates were openly jealous that I'd brought a snorkel.

And then there was perhaps my most unusual dive ever: a couple in our dive shop group were married underwater, displaying their vows on laminated cards while kneeling in the center of a heart-shaped circle of white rocks. Guests banged tanks and held signs saying "HOORAY" as the couple removed their regulators and kissed. I used the rest of my tank to explore the house reef, which had taken a beating from Cyclone Winston. Nevertheless, I found a freckled hawkfish, whose white head spotted with red dots was joined to a shiny golden body. A reddish lightning flatworm, fringed in a black border punctuated by small white dots and dashes, undulated along, as a black spotted sea cucumber probed the rocks. That night, the bride and groom drank a champagne toast at dinner, sipped from closed heel fins. The kava flowed until almost 11 p.m., as our hosts entertained the bride and groom with Fijian dancing. The next morning, many of my dive mates struggled to recover.

to Vuna Reef, the Fijian dive-masters, George Taylor or Tina Riley, would draw a site chart, then brief us, adding that we should be back on the boat in 60 minutes. The morning dives could take us to 70-100 feet (21-30m). Without the benefit of nitrox – the resort's new nitrox generator was not yet online – many dives were 55 minutes or less. But as the dives were progressively shallower throughout the day, bottom times grew to 65 minutes, with tacit approval from the guides.

Visibility on most days was about 40 feet (12m), but while diving at The Stairs, I could

Hugyfot Case Makes GoPro Serious

We all know that underwater footage obtained with little POV cameras like the GoPro has revolutionized what you might see on YouTube and other social media sites. Now comes the next revolution.

Following in the footsteps of the Hero 4 Black, the latest Hero 5 Black has low-light performance, image stabilization and the possibility to shoot 4K video for broadcast-quality video. However, there are shortcomings that users complain about, and the first is its limited battery life. In cold water, it sometimes doesn't outlast a dive.

And, that little built-in LCD screen makes accurately lining up a shot a bit hit-and-miss, unless you have particularly keen eyes. For some technical divers, the 200-foot (60m) depth limitation of its Super Suit underwater case may also be a shortcoming.

Hugyfot, the Belgian manufacturer with an enviable reputation for making machined aluminum camera

housings for top-end DSLRs, made such a housing for the Hero 4. And now, it has released its long-awaited housing for the GoPro Hero 5 Black — and it addresses all those shortcomings.

First, it has a built-in battery that can give five hours of continuous use, even with the seven-inch LCD monitor that allows critical subject framing turned on. And it's rated down to 200m (650 feet) deep!

The Hugyfot GoPro Hero 5 Vision also has grip handles with standard one-inch mounting balls that fit almost any underwater video lights. It sports a color correction filter, and an optional macro lens can be hinged in and out at will. It will set you back nearly two grand, but if you're serious about

photography, it will turn the otherwise excellent GoPro Hero 5 Black into a professional underwater video kit. www.hugyfot.com



Toward week's end, we were in the water at 8:15 a.m. to synch with the tide at the spectacular Great White Wall, which looks white from a distance but is covered in icy blue soft coral. I enjoyed its dramatic swim-thrus, a resting white tip shark, and a pair of white banded anemone shrimp. Our next dive was at Jerry's Jelly, where I got shots of the weird long-snouted intermediate phase bird wrasse, leaf scorpionfish, blue ribbon eel, and black spotted puffer with a brilliant yellow belly, together with a so-called "undescribed" white-fringed brown flatworm with yellow spots. At lunch, we had to duck under an overhanging ledge as rain, blown by a chilly wind, dumped on us. On our last dive, at the aptly named Cabbage Patch, we ended our dive on an amazing field of green cabbage patch coral perhaps 30 yards across.

On my last dive day at the Zoo, I was glad to have my Nikon 105 lens to catch a dogtooth tuna cruising in from the blue and a squadron of pick handle barracuda. My most exciting find was a three-inch-long fish that caught my eye and drew me down to 103 feet (31m) due to its unusual coloration: an orange head and white polka-dotted midsection, with a longish black striped tail. Neither George nor Tina could identify it, nor could we find in the book, Tropical Pacific Reef Fish Identification.

Our last dive on Paradise Reef, at Annie's Bommie, was memorable. The bommies, huge columnar coral heads rising from the sandy bottom, were covered with bouquets of purple, pink, orange and red soft coral, punctuated by various species of hard coral, about which anthias, chromis and butterfly fish swam. Life on the bommie was rich: a black nudibranch with dark green gills (a gloomy tambja) inched across the sandy bottom, and a so-called glorious flatworm, black, with a tri-colored fringe, flew between bommies, like a magic carpet undulating in a breeze. After lunch, the drift dive at Orgasm was more of a tease than ecstatic, though I saw a giant clam, its shell perhaps a foot across, and a light purple nudibranch,

whose body was topped with rows of orange-tipped cerata, like a fur coat whose hairs looked like thick, blubbery fingers (its name: "siboga cuthona.") Looking back, I would probably have requested that all my dives be on Rainbow Reef, and I would have asked the especially eagle-eyed Tina (Christine) to hunt up even more nudibranchs.

On our group's last full day, we piled into an open-air bus for an island tour, shopping for souvenirs in the town of Somosomo and standing on a local monument marking the 180-degree meridian. The resort staff smiled, sang and danced in the back of our "magic bus" along the way, encouraging us to do the same. At Tavoro Falls, cool pools under the beautiful falls made for refreshing stops on the hiking trail. On our way back to the resort, we made a short trek to a local water slide: a series of steep, narrow chutes carved out by a stream flowing through the rock that made for one very exciting ride (bring water sandals).

After Taveuni, we flew to the main island and visited Pacific Harbor at the lovely, modern Pearl Resort to make a two-tank shark dive with Beqa Adventure Divers. Their briefings were thorough, and during the dives, they kept records of shark counts, types, male/female counts, and nicknames for the familiar ones they saw. With 40 bull sharks in the water, a high ratio of divemasters to divers kept some of the more "curious" bulls at a distance as we crouched on a ledge.

I think coral is the Rodney Dangerfield of the marine world: it don't get no respect. But after diving in Fiji, the "Soft Coral Capital of the World," I'm at a loss for words to describe the beauty. Even New World Publications, which publishes the renowned Humann and DeLoach series, has no title covering tropical Pacific reef coral. I just hope this missive has offered a taste of the variety of under- and above-water experiences you might find if you get a chance to make the trek.

— S.P.

Our undercover diver's bio: *S.P. says, "Learning to scuba (35 years ago), my beavertail neoprene wetsuit got me through my YMCA silver-level certification, even if I did freeze my bippy during 100-foot descents onto Great Lakes freighters. I've gradually earned all the main certifications, including Master Scuba Diver, and I have an SDI/TDI/ERDI solo diving certification that comes in handy when I am sometimes left on my own on dives while taking photos. In between frequent dive trips, from the Caribbean to the Asia Pacific, I am a public safety diver and try to dive once a week year-round when our local lakes are not frozen over, and when they, are I'm ice diving."*



Diver's Compass: My dive package for 10 nights in an ocean bungalow with eight days of three boat dives and all meals was \$2947 for me as a diver and \$2662 for my non-diving spouse, which included unlimited shore diving, 25% taxes, and airport transfers ... Nitrox goes for \$10/tank ... Tipping was pooled; we gave about \$400 ... Fruit smoothies/milkshakes: \$4; Fiji Gold/Bitter: \$4.25; mixed drink specials: \$6.25 ... Credit cards were accepted for a 3% fee ... The dive shop had a large assortment of rental gear, plus safety sausages and reels, masks, snorkels, straps, and pointers ... From Nadi, the main airport, it's a puddle jumper to Taveuni, with baggage charges \$1.50-\$3/kg (ask your travel agent to get proper documentation that you are going to dive in Fiji, and the rate may be lower). Distilled spirits can cost up to \$100/liter ... Get an Australian/New Zealand-style angled dual prong converter for the 220v current ... We liked the Tanoa International Hotel in Nadi and the Pearl Resort in Pacific Harbor ... I took a back-country river kayaking trip, where I learned how highland villagers shop for groceries: I watched Fijians who had gathered armloads of spinach swim across the river back to their village ... Rosie Tours handled our shore excursions around Nadi ... U.S. Dollars and credit cards were accepted. Websites: www.paradiseinfiji.com; <http://fijisharkdive.com>; <http://www.riversfiji.com>

Belize, Utila, Palau, Komodo, Bonaire

Caribbean whalesharks, missing hammerheads

The Aggressor Fleet markets a wide range of liveaboards, with one operating at almost every conceivable diving destination in the world. Perhaps the most favored destination is Belize, which has calm waters and is easy to reach – it’s only a two hour flight from Houston. It’s a great destination for first-time liveboard divers, and gets plenty of repeat business as well.

Take, for example, Lynda Durfee (Alexandria, VA) and her experience with the *MV Belize Aggressor IV*. She gave it five stars in most departments including value-for-money, since she took advantage of a one-third reduction in the normal price for certain May dates. In fact, she wrote she couldn’t say anything bad about the boat except that there were some AC problems leading to a cabin warmer than wanted.

She loved the ‘fin-to-fin’ service, meaning she never even had to put her own fins on or take them off. It was done for her. She said “the food was terrific” and her only real complaint seemed to be that a single dive guide escorting 19 guests was a little overambitious, although that would have suited a lot of divers who were free to go off alone in their buddy pairs.

It was a pity that the diving did not live up to her expectations. www.aggressor.com/belize-iv.php

We like hearing about improvements. George Borton (Venice, FL) was on *MV Aqua Cat in The Bahamas* in March and told that things had been improved since our August 2016 *Undercurrent* review. He wrote, “Apparently the ship was maintained during offseason, as I did not find it in the condition reported [in August.] We had good towels, no rust in the bathroom and the carpeting

seemed to be in good shape. The crew was excellent, and the food was very good — especially for a liveboard,” but added he was very disappointed in the diving itself, because, “The reefs were in poor condition and covered with algae and a lot of sand.” www.allstarliveaboards.com/aquacat

Long Haul Liveaboards

It was a similar story with Phil Johnston (Bayswater, Western Australia), who was also (surprisingly) disappointed with the diving, when he otherwise enjoyed a May trip on the *MV Okeanos Aggressor II* to Costa Rica’s **Cocos Island**. He gave the boat four and five stars in every category, saying he couldn’t fault the boat or crew. Stan Waterman was ever fond of saying that “Cocos always delivers,” but Phil reports that the diving on his trip it failed to “live up to its stellar reputation.” He failed to see any schooling hammerheads. Consolation prizes came in the less-than-frequent sightings of a large tiger shark, Galapagos sharks and a large manta that turned up at Alcyone. The inshore dive sites were “frankly boring and difficult, due to a strong surge and marginal visibility.”

Well, that’s nature for you!

www.aggressor.com/cocos-ii.php

As far as marine life goes, we have to enjoy what is there. Frederick R. Turoff (Philadelphia, PA) went to the volcanic **Revillagigedos** archipelago south of Baja California in March aboard the *MV Rocio del Mar*. His previous trip 16 years before had rewarded him with humpback whales, so his expectations were high, but he saw none this time. However, “that didn’t spoil the trip, as we had numerous encounters with mantas and sharks.

Son of Australian Underwater Legend Sues

Decompression sickness has little respect for reputation. It matters little that you are the son of Emmy-Award-winning underwater film-maker and author of the *Australian Skindiver’s Handbook*, Ben Cropp, as Adam Cropp found out.

The Cairns Post reports that Cropp, 33, was working as a divemaster and guest lecturer for the Cairns-based company, Tusa Dive in 2012 when he became ill on the 11th day of a two-week trip. His dives had ranged from

33 feet (10m) to 104 feet (32m) and had repeated overnight watch shifts, which he claimed left him fatigued.

Cropp is suing Tusa Dive for more than US\$356,000, alleging the company failed to follow procedures and contact the Townsville Hyperbaric Center so he could be treated within 24 hours of showing symptoms of DCS.

Large mantas enjoyed us divers enough to stay with us for most of the dives, which lasted around 45 minutes . . . The *Rocio del Mar* is a fine boat, and the crew takes care of passenger needs. The only downer happened only to my cabin — a pipe sprung a leak in the cabin wall on day three, so the carpet was wet for most of the trip.” The trip to the Revillagigedos Islands from Los Cabos San Lucas takes about 28 hours each way, “so those who are prone to seasickness should medicate before departure.” www.rociodelmarliveaboard.com

The **Fiji** liveaboard *Nai'a* has an enviable reputation with *Undercurrent* readers. As usual, it got five stars all around for the April visit by Larry Schnabel (Templeton, CA). Larry has been to most of the top dive spots in the world, so he knows what he’s talking about when he says, “*Nai'a* is superbly run, very good food, and exceptional service. Best of the many dive boats I have been on. It’s truly the Rolls Royce of dive boats.”

He did feature one complaint, though. On boarding day, with all the arriving passengers’ luggage still on deck, they were told everyone should break out their dive gear and prepare for a check-out dive. You know how annoying it must be when you’ve packed your gear and clothes for travel so that fragile stuff is mixed up with a wetsuit and soft clothing for protection? This meant that the contents of everyone’s bags were strewn around the dive deck, with resulting chaos. The dive guide stated that everyone should have been told to pack the dive gear separately (he’s obviously got little experience of airport baggage handlers) so that “when the call comes with all haste to pull out our dive

gear, the task would have been easier.” So *Nai'a* — close to perfection but “no cigar!” www.naia.com.fj

Caribbean ‘Alarms and Excursions’

Michael Marmesh (Miami, FL) went to **Utopia Village** in **Utila** in April and hit a lucky streak with his diving experience.

After he and his partner had waited for 40 years to dive with whale sharks, they finally hit the mark four days in a row. On their third day of diving, they’d seen two sperm whales during a trip to the dive site (not close enough to snorkel with them), but ended up snorkeling with a pod of dolphins. Back at base, they got news of a whale shark in the vicinity, and their special trip out was rewarded with an 18-minute encounter with a young one they named ‘Elvis’ in honor of their boat driver. He liked the beautiful, healthy corals and numerous critters, and says, “So would I go back if I knew there would be no whale shark encounters? Absolutely!” www.utopiautila.com

We wrote about Aldora Diving in Cozumel in the last issue, but here are others to consider. Robert L. Short (Colorado Springs, CO) chose **Dive-with-Cristina** and her 42-foot dive boat *Nina* in **Cozumel** in April. He vetted many other dive operators and was looking for a larger, more comfortable vessel that wasn’t a “cattle boat” because nowadays he’s “built for comfort and not for speed ... Javier, the divemaster, went out of his way to make my diving better with education and tips on getting the most out of our dives.” www.villaselencantocozumel.com and www.divewithcristina.com

Don’t be a Diving Heart Attack Victim

A high percentage of diver deaths are due to a heart attack suffered under the stress of diving and often the deceased divers his unaware that he or she had heart disease. After writing reading about medical tests in *Undercurrent* in the last issue, Bruce R Hoyle MD (Newport Beach, CA) wrote to say that an EKG/checkup is not good enough and reiterated the importance of a CT heart scan and coronary calcium score for divers.

A coronary calcium scan is a CT scan of your heart that detects a buildup of calcium in the walls of your coronary arteries, a sign of atherosclerosis, coronary heart or micro vascular disease.

Cardiac computed tomography (CT) for calcium scoring produce pictures of the coronary arteries to

determine if they are blocked or narrowed by plaque — an indicator for atherosclerosis or coronary artery disease (CAD). The information obtained can help evaluate whether you are at increased risk for heart attack.

Myocardial perfusion scanning uses a small amount of radioactive substance to create imagers which show blood flow to the heart muscle and a coronary angiogram is used to locate the exact position and severity of any narrowing or blockage.

If you are aging, overweight, or have been out of the water for a while, don’t become an unwitting statistic. See your cardiologist.

(Source: radiologyinfo.org/kingstonhospital.nhs.uk)

Shooting RAW on your iPhone

There is a plethora of underwater housings available for iPhones and Androids. Most have the ability to fit either a macro lens or a wide-angle/fisheye lens to get you closer to your subject, but their results have been limited by both the inability to synchronize effectively with off-board flash and the difficulty in getting the image colors right.

Serious underwater photographers shoot RAW files on their expensive cameras because they can then adjust color and exposure on a laptop, meaning they don't have to get things perfect during a short dive.



Now, you can do that on your phone. Apps are available that will allow you to disable the in-device image signal processing and record the RAW data. Some favorites include Obscura, Manual, and ProCamera, which will work with iOS10 to shoot RAW files:

You open the app and tap on the settings button, turning on the 'Save RAW' toggle. You usually have the option to save RAW and jpegs simultaneously. There are many different RAW standards, and each camera manufacturer has its own, but Apple has chosen to use the ubiquitous

Adobe .DNG format for iOS10.

Gregory Bruce (Camarillo, CA) and his wife were in **Cozumel** at the same time. He dived **Blue XT Sea Diving** and suggested it merited five stars for experienced divers, but less for beginners. An old hand at Cozumel diving, he liked that his every request was accommodated, and says it will not be his last visit with them. "Diving in Cozumel is always a blast. Diving with Blue XT Sea just makes it that much better." www.bluxtseadiving.com

Dominica has long been a Caribbean favorite of *Undercurrent* divers who like the rainforest, the hiking, and the lush reefs. Desiree Bell (New Orleans, LA) dived with **Nature Island Dive** in March, staying at their apartments. "It's a great operation. They generally have very small groups and cater to the client's needs and wants. I was there for a month and only dived the same site twice if I requested it . . . The sites are all just a short boat trip away. Sometimes, the boat would head back to shore for the surface interval. The dives consist of walls and pinnacles, for the most part, and the reefs are in excellent shape." Desiree saw virtually no bleaching and plenty of biodiversity, including several encounters with sea turtles — and on one dive, she heard humpback whales singing the entire time she was underwater. www.natureislanddive.com

"It should've been better!" That's what Bruce J. Levine (Dunedin, FL) said about the **Buddy Dive Resort** in **Bonaire**. His group of 20 or so thought the resort was too crowded, to which a group of 20 certainly contributed. When he arrived in March, he was unimpressed with the tired-looking accommodation. The room was average, with everything worn, like the stained cushions and the patio doors

with the handle missing. He wrote that there were unprotected electrical cables and connectors lying close to walkways and weeds growing through the deck of the pool area, with the pool itself never less than cloudy during his stay.

"The dive operation appeared chaotic. At least two people were injured and attended to by paramedics the first day. The resort accommodates groups [that aren't staying there], including those from cruise ships that anchor nearby. There is a briefing when you arrive and a checkout dive that no-one checks you out on . . . I did not expect a valet or concierge diving. I just expected safe, consistent and professional service. Sometimes I got it and sometimes I didn't." www.buddydive.com

Also in Bonaire, Ken (no surname given) from Toronto, Canada, stayed at the **Divi Flamingo** in March, and thought, despite the renovations, it was quite shabby in parts. "The new stuff is running downhill quickly. The new bathrooms were needed, but ours already had lots of dark mold stains in the shower. The rest of the suite appeared original and was a little shabby, with drawers that were falling apart. The house-cleaning service was questionable, as we were missed one day. Close inspection of the corners of the room revealed clumps of dust bunnies, and the closet below the air conditioner was dirty with mold." goo.gl/brgq4a

Still in Bonaire and full of praise for **Bruce Bowker's Carib Inn Retail Store**, Joel Horie (UT) on a trip in March, together with Blake Hottle (CA) who visited in May, were both very enthusiastic about the service and good advice given,



TROPICAL ICE

"In KL Smith's latest, *Tropical Ice*, you can taste the rum, feel the heat, and smell the blood."

Alan Dean Foster, award-winning novelist
The Force Awakens (Star Wars)

A.K.A
BEN
DAVISON
Undercurrent

AN ECO-THRILLER
KL SMITH

More than 60 million sharks are killed every year for their fins. Millions of seahorses are pulverized to create an imaginary aphrodisiac. And Matt Oliver is out to stop the carnage.

Praise for the Scuba Eco-Thriller *Tropical Ice*

“One of the best adventure thrillers I’ve ever read and I’ve read a million! A true page-turner. Listen, do you like Clive Cussler’s novels? Ken Smith is a better writer than old Clive, and he’s actually lived the life he writes about. Go! Buy! Trust me! You won’t be sorry.”

Homer Hickam, author, *Rocket Boys/October Sky* and *Carrying Albert Home*

“In *Tropical Ice*, you can taste the rum, feel the heat, and smell the blood. Like a sun-bleached palm frond crusted in sea salt, there’s a rough coating of true-life Caribbean clinging to every phrase and scene.”

Alan Dean Foster, award-winning novelist, *Star Wars, The Chronicles of Riddick*

“*Tropical Ice* moves faster than a hungry shark. This is a nail-biting page-turner, one that pits a reluctant travel writer against the underbelly of Belize. The book’s ending -- actually there’s more than one remarkable ending -- is one that I sure never saw that coming.

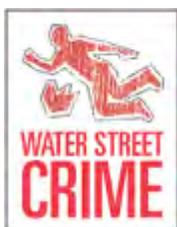
Mary Peachin, author, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Sharks and Scuba Caribbean*

“*Tropical Ice* is a fast moving thriller that would grab any adventure reader but will especially appeal to scuba divers. It’s a well-crafted tale of intrigue, suspense, corrupt behavior and a nice nod to conservation. Perfect for the beach, poolside, or long decompression stops.”

Bret Gilliam, Founder of TDI/SDI, past president, UWATEC

Tropical Ice is today’s news: Divers panic as sharks rip a body from an ice block during an organized shark feed . . . Struggling travel writer Matt Oliver discovers thousands of shark fins on a Belize island . . . A beautiful rainforest lodge owner conceals her own deep secrets . . . Reefs and wildlife are destroyed for lust, money and phony aphrodisiacs . . . Belize police accuse a failing American dive resort owner of murder . . . A dramatic high seas battle pits Matt Oliver against the shark finners . . . A dangerous night dive to hunt for clues . . . A vicious hurricane ravages the land . . . Mysterious thugs are relentless, by land and sea . . . And a climax filled with surprise twists, turns, retribution . . . and love interrupted.

Author Ben Davison, writing as KL Smith: He’s the founder and editor of *Undercurrent*, the monthly guide for traveling scuba divers.



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even saying “Bruce is truly a national treasure!”
www.caribinn.com

When Chip Wright (Hebron, KY), an airline pilot, got stranded with his crew in **St. Maarten** in April, due to their destination airport getting snowed in, he and his co-pilot decided to do some diving with **Ocean Explorers Dive Center** in Simpson Bay. “It doesn’t cater to beginners. You’re expected to have a degree of experience, competence, and confidence. You board the boats by wading into the water and climbing the ladder, and everyone is expected to help in getting everything on the boat. It’s well organized, efficient, and it makes the best of not having a dock.” He thought that the highlight of his two days’ diving was the shark dive that needed no feeding to attract the sharks. www.stmaartendiving.com

Traveling Farther Afield

Everyone now heads for Indonesia, or so it seems. Ken New (Minneapolis, MN) went to the remote island of **Komodo** in April, famous for its dragons, and once again it was almost five stars all around. He and his partner stayed at the Italian-owned **Komodo Resort and Diving Club** and dived with the resort’s **Sebayur Diving Center**. His only gripe was an ecological one. He was dismayed to see they allowed groups of five to eight snorkelers to stand on the coral at times. These people were not from the same resort, but the Indonesian staff members are too polite to take issue with people from the West. That said, he signed off his report with, “By the end of our week, we wished we could stay another one.” Komodo Resort Management — it’s time to step in and speak up. www.komodoresort.com

Palau, in Micronesia, has had some bad diving press recently because of its recent overwhelming popularity with divers from Taiwan and the Chinese mainland — who apparently are not as ecologically sensitive as other divers have learned to be. Rose Mueller (Houston, TX) made her 26th visit there this April, staying at the **Palau Pacific Resort** and diving with its **Splash** in-house dive operation.

She commented that the country has decided to limit cheap trips from China so that the resort was devoid of masses of tourists. She found herself in the company of Americans, Europeans, and Japanese. This apparent downturn in tourism, she thinks, has caused the resort to eliminate several key employees. Many rooms needed refurbishing. The resort appeared to focus more on the

Surely Not Another Scuba Kickstarter?

We’ve seen endless permutations of propulsion for divers, from full-blown DPVs like the Hollis Sea Jet and the less-expensive See Doo, to the back-mounted Pegasus Thruster, the leg-mounted Jet Boots and the forearm-mounted Jet Pack.

Now, an enterprising Germany-based inventor, Un-Yong Park, has come up with a wrist-mounted propulsion device. The Scubalec Jet Drive consists of a battery and two cylindrical thrusters, each of which uses an impeller to draw water through an opening and then expel it out of a nozzle — similar to the way a squid propels itself through the water.

A thumb-operated throttle controls the thrust, and the user steers simply by pointing his arm in the direction he wants to go. It doesn’t power you much faster than you can swim, but it saves you energy. Its removable lithium ion battery is only good for around ten minutes, so no good for cave penetrations! Park is attempting to raise capital for Scubalec via a Kickstarter campaign, and at the time of writing, he had almost reached his goal of 10,000 Euros. The planned retail price will be \$427. www.kickstarter.com

It doesn’t stop there. Raising funds by Indiegogo, Sublue, the designers of the Whiteshark MIX, say its hand-held device will have a top speed of nearly 4mph and go to 130 feet (40m) deep. They claim its battery will last up to one hour powering its four-leaf Kaplan bladed double-propellers. They hope to deliver by October and the price will be close to \$500. <https://goo.gl/dDvK7u>.

We’re not fans of gambling on kickstarter funding, but if you have money to throw away ...

\$1000-per-night bungalows aimed at the rich and famous.

That said, the dive operation was busier than ever (although they dived in small groups), and the water had better clarity than ever, but the sharks and Napoleon wrasses seemed fewer. It’s still a diving operation worth five stars, and Rose thinks it value-for-money. www.palauappr.com

Closer to Home

You can have great diving closer to home in

Florida, as Ed Vaillancourt (Albuquerque, NM) knows. He was in **Key Largo** on a business trip in March and managed to steal away for a day of diving the *Spiegel Grove* wreck with his wife and **Quiescence Diving Services**.

“Quiescence was a great choice, with guaranteed low diver count onboard (6 or less). The good ratings from other *Undercurrent* diver reports sealed the deal, and so we walked into their dive shop hoping for the best. Kate greeted us, and she was delightful, and it was the start of a great day. The rest of the staff were equally as friendly and helpful.”

March isn't necessarily the best time in Florida, but they found themselves between two storm systems, and the weather was good. “Down on the deck of the wreck, we found the usual suspects: Great barracuda, large Nassau grouper (but no Goliath), yellowtail and black fin snapper, blue tangs, sharp

nose puffer, damsel, and butterfly fish, bristle worms and more. There are over 150 species that hang out on and around the ship, and my dive buddy was very busy counting.”

Over all, Ed ranked the Quiescence dive operation right up in the 5-star range for its laid-back friendliness, efficiency and full-scale operation. <http://keylargodiving.com>

So now, let us hear from you. To aid your fellow *Undercurrent* subscribers, please send us a report on any trips you've made in the last six 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.

Now, go have a good dive!

Fancy Buying a Dive Resort Operation in the Sun? *it's not for the faint-hearted!*

With kids growing up and leaving home, it's a time to re-evaluate your life and maybe have the life you have denied yourself. It's a time when some middle-aged men buy big motorcycles and some women take up mountain climbing. Many divers with an empty nest begin to book all those dive trips we promised ourselves. But some even go one stage further. They buy a dive resort, where the sun always

You can buy Buccaneer Adventures in the South Pacific for \$500,000

shines and everyone is intent on having a good time. What would that be like?

You may remember that last year the owners of Kosrae Nautilus Resort raffled off their resort, and a young Australian, 26-year-old Josh Ptasznyk, won it for a \$49 ticket! Without such luck, one would need to invest a lot more, but with property prices in North America booming, you may be tempted to sell your house and make a life-changing move.

So what's available, and what would it cost? First, beyond your cash investment, you'll need a cash

cushion to see you through the initial operating days. Since you probably have no idea how to run a resort, you might insist that the sellers stick around for a while to see you past any pitfalls, which might even include a little local animosity directed at a newcomer. And, since you're headed to a job with round-the-clock responsibility, you'd better have the stamina and temperament to manage it.

So, if you're up to the task and harbor the fantasy, there is a plethora of dive business opportunities, some close to civilization and others that are very remote indeed.

Have You Linguistic Skills?

Do you speak French? How about an operation in Tikehau, an island in the Tuamotus of French Polynesia, with some of the best shark diving in the world with its shark cave dive where sharks pour out like bees from a hive when disturbed. But it's a long way from medical help should you need it. \$244,000 will buy it. www.tuamotu-plongee.com

The Philippines might be more appealing, and no need for a second language. There's a PADI 5-star center up for grabs in northern

That Kosrae Dive Resort Lottery Winner

You may remember *Undercurrent* (August 2016) reported that the Beitz family, original founders and owners of the Kosrae Nautilus Resort, which has plenty of great diving, wanted to retire. But instead of putting their property up for sale, they hit on the novel idea of raffling it off. They did, raising more money than they expected, reported by *The Guardian* to be in the region of \$4 million, with more than 75,000 people in 100 different countries buying raffle tickets, Josh Ptasznyk, 26, an Australian tax accountant, became the proud owner for the mere investment of \$49. We contacted Ptasznyk to see how he was doing. This is his reply:

Dear *Undercurrent* readers,

I first arrived on Kosrae in October before returning to Australia to pack up my life. I left my accounting job and moved over in November, so I have been on the island for at least six months now.

Owning a resort is in some ways blissful, while on other days it is challenging; often each day will be a different challenge or opportunity. Most days involve opening up the resort, checking around to see if anything needs to be fixed, closing up, counting the takings for the day, and taking inventory every couple of days to keep track of stock. Every month involves ordering in new supplies of dry goods and frozen stock, loading the containers with stock when goods arrive. Every day I will manage bookings, answer emails and talk with guests and help organize tours.

My life has changed a lot since moving here to Kosrae and taking over the resort. I have learned to

scuba dive, getting my PADI open water and in the next few months will start my advanced open water. This time last year I did not see myself diving and rarely visited the beach.

Nowadays I will be out snorkeling with expats on the island every week and regularly go on hikes and dive every couple of weeks. The work life is very different to a 9 to 5 job in Wollongong, Australia, where I lived before, and in a way, I am working 24 hours a day seven days a week; but I really have more control over the time I work and relax.

The main challenge is the remoteness and lack of supply on the island. Most items need to be ordered in from Guam or the USA by ship, which requires me to predict ahead of time what we need. These supplies can on occasion be delayed, leading to shortages on the island. There are also often challenges with filling a freight container between the local small businesses on the island, so on occasion, we are required to buy on the island from larger stores.

The perks include living opposite the beach, being able to go out diving when I want, and the beautiful waters for diving and snorkeling. There is also the lovely scenery, the mountain hikes, and kayaking through the mangroves. The history of the place, including the remains from the WWII occupation and the local culture, is a highlight.

— Josh

www.kosraenautilus.com

Palawan, for a mere quarter of a million dollars.
www.idcelmidopalawanphilippines.com

If you're not ready to get into deep water on your own, consider a partnership. For a mere 60 grand, the owner is looking for a partner to help him grow his Discover Scuba Diving business at Koh Samui in Thailand. You'd have to be quite a risk-taker to get into a deal like this.

For half a million dollars, you have a lot of choices. What about a setup on a small, remote island in North Sulawesi, Indonesia, a Bangka resort with seven rooms and potential to expand? The British owners want to return to the UK to get better schooling for their children, but they'll probably be around for a couple of years to hold your hand while you take over the business.

www.nomaddiversbangka.com

Fancy a small liveaboard that takes but six passengers? Norwegian Freddy Storheil, a pioneer of Red Sea diving and, later, Thailand and the Mergui archipelago, is retiring at long last and selling his steel ketch, *Colona II*, for \$180,000. It's a vessel familiar to many European divers, and you could even sail around the world in her. Freddy has! At the moment, it's in the Philippines, but could be delivered almost anywhere.

www.thailand-sail.com/colona.html

Be aware that in some countries you need a local as a business partner to operate legally. Evidently not so on the island of Niue in the South Pacific. Here there's a dive business, Buccaneer Adventures, complete with a house to live in, for half a million dollars. The deal includes five boats and four cars. The seller has health issues and it's time to move to where he can find suitable healthcare.

www.niuedive.com

If you've already read that new novel by KL Smith, *Tropical Ice*, you might be tempted to spend \$650,000 on a dive business at Ambergris Caye, Belize (www.ecologicdivers.com) or \$395,000 on a dive center on Roatan, Honduras, which has up to a one-year hand-over period from the current owner. You might need that help if you've never repaired a compressor or driven a dive boat. www.westbaydivers.com

Everyone needs to go home eventually, which is why \$180,000 will buy you a thriving PADI/SSI business in Playa Herradura and Playa Jaco, Costa Rica. The owner says he's getting old and wants to return to Italy, where he has another dive center that needs some time dedicated to it. Are there any fish left in the Mediterranean to see?

Closer to home, how about a start-up dive business for sale in Baja California for only \$40,000? It's only been operating for a year, and the dive season lasts only eight months, but the gringos keep moving there.

Failing health or retirement are common reasons for owners to sell out, which is why you need to be in good health if you're going into the dive business abroad. That's the case with the Deep Blue Dive Resort in Utila, Honduras, which accommodates 20 guests, has three ocean front buildings, and a weather-safe dock for its dive boat. It's available for \$1.2 million, less than the price of an average house in San Francisco or London. www.deepblueutila.com

Want to Stay in America?

If you wanted to stay in the U.S., Florida beckons. \$375,000 buys you a Palm Beach County dive shop where the owner thinks it's time for him to semi-retire. He'll consider a partnership. The only dive shop in Dade County, FL, is up for grabs at \$200,000 including a stock inventory valued at \$130,000. Located in Coconut Grove, Miami, its leased premises includes a two-bedroom apartment.

If warm weather is essential to your plans, what about Kauai, Hawaii? A dive operation for sale

Why Don't Some Divers Drop Weights in an Emergency?

Dear *Undercurrent*:

"Has anyone ever tried to get a feel for how divers think about the decision whether to drop weights and what factors they consider?"

"I'm embarrassed to admit it, but more than once I've been in a situation where I was having difficulties, and I was trying to decide whether I needed to drop my weights or not, and I found myself worrying about the cost of my weight belt and the hassle of telling the dive operator that I had lost 12 pounds of his weights."

"Obviously, a rational person would dismiss those two issues immediately. After all, one is talking about possibly drowning. But still, those thoughts went through my mind."

"Am I unusual or typical in worrying about something about which I should not?"

Samuel Johnson (Greensboro, NC)

Dear Sam,

No, you're not unusual. And while I know of no new research, nearly 40 years ago *Undercurrent* carried a story about research conducted along the beaches of Los Angeles County. In those days, L.A. County had a diver certification program, and divers wore a horseshollar BC without automatic inflators, wore too much weight, and the tanks had funky j-valves for "reserves." I wrote about their research, in which they found that the main reason for divers in trouble not drop-

ping their weight belts was the cost of the belt and the perceived lack of pride in losing it. So, your response is not at all uncommon. In fact, many dive operators today will tell you that if you have to drop the weight belt you rented from them, you don't have to pay for it. They understand the reasons behind our reluctance.

That said, today's diver has fewer reasons to need to drop the belt. If you are properly weighted to be neutrally buoyant, you will not need to drop any weights until you reach the surface and find you are unable to inflate your BC. A neutrally buoyant diver will start to become positively buoyant if he fins up only a short distance, because the residual air in the BC will expand due to reducing water pressure.

Of course, if you are significantly overweighted and carrying gear that is negatively buoyant, you may need to add air to your BCD to rise. If you can't add air — say your BCD is faulty — can't kick up, and don't want to drop your heavy gear, then all that is left is dropping the weight belt, which is worth more than a few dollars less than your life.

That said, many troubled divers who reach the surface are unable to stay there without inflating their BCDs or dropping their weights, and then they tragically drop and drown.

And, of course, it may be that the only way to float an unconscious diver may be to release his weight belt.

— Ben Davison

there is said to be very lean and profitable. If you ever wanted to live in Hawaii and get paid to go diving, a \$150,000 stake is what you'll need.

Some Sage Advice

A word of caution from someone who once owned his own dive center: It's very hard work and not for the faint-hearted. Out in the boat, while the customers are enjoying the ride, you have to have one eye on the weather, the other on their safety, and another on your itinerary. While those same customers are enjoying a riotous evening, you'll be hard at work stripping down the compressor or answering emails or paying bills. It's not a business for someone who wants to take it easy. It certainly isn't something to do when you retire. And if you're out to make a small fortune from diving, you'd best

start with a large one! And, there are no guarantees.

European readers might find a European dive center more appealing, because you're still in range of EU health-cover — something that's important as you get older — although the warm weather only lasts a few months of the year.

For more information as to what's available world-wide, go to <https://goo.gl/XddCRp>

Finally, before you even think about it, read the 1965 classic *Don't Stop the Carnival*, by Herman Wouk. It's a humorous tale of a naïve fellow who buys his own little tropical resort, and as you'll see, the problems are endless. It's still available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

– john@undercurrent.org

More on those Disappearing Warships

how does an entire shipwreck disappear?

Undercurrent reported in both January and March of this year that the wreck of several enormous warships, sunk near Borneo during the battle of the Java Sea in 1942, had disappeared. The *HNLMS Java* and *HNLMS De Ruyter*, the Australian submarine *HMAS Perch*, the *HMS Encounter*, *HMS Electra* and the *HMS Exeter* are simply gone.

The mystery continues. A team of research divers tasked with assessing the condition of the two Dutch vessels found that the wreck of *HMS Electra* had been gutted, a huge section the Dutch warship *HNLMS Kortenaer* was missing and an eighth vessel, the *USS Houston*, was mostly intact, but was clearly in the process of being salvaged.

These were not trivial vessels. The *Perch* was as long as a football field, and the *De Ruyter*, the biggest of them all, was more than 560 feet (170m) long, and they have disappeared.

WWII warships were heavily built. The armored *Exeter* displaced 8520 tons. When it comes to scrap, the hulls offer lots of structured steel to recover. No modern steel is radiation-free, thanks to all the nuclear tests that have occurred, so radiation-free steel sunk before the advent of the nuclear age has added value, because it is in demand for technical applications — in particular, the development of nuclear energy weapons. It can raise up to \$4000 per metric ton.

In 1942, the USA, the UK, Australia and the Netherlands made a hastily formed alliance to try to stem Japanese encroachment in what is now Indonesia. Soon 14 Allied vessels were in a battle

Great White v Orcas? Orcas Win

Katherine, the tagged great white shark, continues to patrol the east coast of Florida. The group Ocearch, which tagged the shark off Cape Cod in 2013, said she has been as far north as Orlando. The 2,300-pound shark has traveled 31,000 miles since tracking began.

Is there anything scarier than a great white shark? Well, the corpses of three large great whites have been recovered in the Gansbaai area of South Africa with their nutrient-rich livers apparently surgically removed. What's doing this? It's a pod of orcas that have learned to drown the sharks by inverting them and then simply biting through their trunk between the pectoral fins to remove the prized liver, leaving the rest of the organs.

After the dead sharks had drifted into shallow water, scientists from the Dyer Island Conservation Trust autopsied them (the largest was 16 feet — 4.9m) and determined that the orca's bite on the inverted shark allows the buoyant liver to float free. Orcas are the great white's only predator.

Diving in Sri Lanka is Not All Bad

Reading the report in *Undercurrent* of the woes of the *Sri Lanka Aggressor*, Tim Hedrick and Phil Niccolls from Chicago, IL, both experienced divers who were on board the *Aggressor* for a week in February, wrote to emphasize the pros of wreck diving there.

“Yes, the wrecks were deep. And the absence of nitrox was inexcusable for such an itinerary — tantamount to a tech-dive itinerary without trimix. Repeated, exclusively deep dives on plain air pushed us further into diving limits than we normally venture. Given the pitiful bottom times allowed with air, it took us three full dives to explore the entirety of the [wreck of the] *Chief Dragon*.”

“But luckily our charter was one of the few able to make every dive without weather interrupting the schedule. Previous Captain’s Logs, when the boat was operating, detailed many missed dives and missed days due to weather.”

“We actually enjoyed it! We knew when we booked this trip that the itinerary would be mostly wreck diving, and while the reefs were barren of life, the wrecks surely were not, with schooling fish, octopus, lobsters, soft coral and more. Most of the wrecks were in great condition, littered with the cars, construction equip-

ment and building materials they carried when they went down. The stories and legends behind their sinking were equally fascinating. In an unplanned move, we actually dove on the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the *SS Perseus*. We found the wreck-heavy itinerary to be a unique departure from other liveaboard trips we have experienced.”

Naren Gunasekeras, a local dive business owner in Sri Lanka at the time, helped set up the *Sri Lanka Aggressor* operation. Naren told *Undercurrent*, “Overall, I think the vessel’s owner underestimated the complexities of getting anything done in Sri Lanka. While a fair amount of the country has rubbish diving, Colombo is an exception with the 15 wrecks. They represent some of the healthiest reef systems in the country, and the wrecks are quite interesting, as well ranging from WWI Merchant Navy ships to a 150m long bulk carrier, which went down in 2012. The diving is quite deep, however, and challenging. Visibility can be low, especially in October, November and April, but December through March is usually good, with February/March being the best.” More information is available: www.srilanka-divingtours.com

with a crack Japanese cruiser squadron and lost 10 ships and 2,100 sailors within two days.

Australian wreck diver Kevin Denlay has been diving WWII wrecks since the early 1990s, and his team found these Java Sea wrecks in 2002. Since

It’s put a big dent in the region’s embryonic underwater tourism industry.

then, a fledgling leisure diving industry began to grow around them. Initially, they were plundered by some less-than-scrupulous divers for their brass and bronze fittings, especially the *HMAS Perch* and *USS Houston*, effectively within swimming distance of the shore.

Eventually, pirate salvagers using heavy lifting equipment made off with the more valuable parts, those made of brass or copper, even as they moved on to less-valuable metals such as aluminum. Such salvage operations usually leave a lot of unwanted debris in their wake.

What is unusual about the missing Java Sea wrecks is that not a single nut or bolt remains. Denlay suggests that a large barge equipped with a heavy lifting crane would have been needed to raise a whole battle fleet in such a way and says he can’t figure out how nobody noticed or reported such a massive undertaking.

How could wrecks like this have been protected from illegal salvage? To quote Denlay, “If you’re asking about wrecks in Asian waters, they cannot. Save parking a gunboat over every wreck [full time], that is.”

To lift such an enormous amount of scrap in such a clinical and clandestine way probably required the resources of a nation-state and the cooperation of regional and local officials. Only big imprints of where the wrecks lay at 165 feet (50m) on the bottom leave testimony to their existence. It’s put a big dent in the region’s embryonic underwater tourism industry, and the desecration of those that were registered as war graves is a serious offense.

On the 8th May this year, *The Maritime Executive* reported that the 8000-metric tonne Chinese grab dredger *Chuan Hong 68* was finally arrested by Indonesian authorities for allegedly scavenging the wrecks of the Japanese destroyer *Sagiri*, the *Hiyoshi Maru*, the *Katori Maru*, the steamship *Igara* and the tanker *Seven Skies*, after being previously chased and escaping to Malaysia.

UK newspaper *The Guardian* found that a university and a maritime authority in Indonesia were

involved in licensing some operations to salvage the disappeared WWII wrecks. Photos taken by locals of a vessel over the wreck sites correspond closely to the *Chuan Hong 68*.

In the meantime, we are left to speculate which country needs radiation-free steel for its nuclear industry and might prefer to procure that metal in a secretive manner?

(sources: www.historyanswers.co.uk/outsideonline/the-guardian)

Fire Aboard a Red Sea Liveaboard

and a crew ill-equipped to deal with it

“Next thing we knew, the smoke was thick and black, and flames had engulfed the galley and were coming out of the windows — it seemed that water had been thrown onto a cooking-oil fire.”

It was May 13th. According to Ben Low, a British guest aboard the vessel *MV Overseas*, the boat had been chartered with a crew of eight from a company called Port Ghalib Divers and departed from Hurghada, Egypt. The 23 divers included French, Indian, Russian and Turkish divers and their own Egyptian dive-guide.

Low told *Undercurrent* that 45 minutes from the home port, he saw “light white smoke coming from the galley towards the bow, and smelled burning

cooking oil. None of the crew spoke to us — they just disappeared with a tiny water extinguisher and a bucket of water. Things got worse, but we passengers were told nothing.

“The captain shut off one engine and steered into the wind, causing the fire and thick smoke to be channeled through the boat towards where we were at the stern.”

Low tried to go below to warn a friend asleep in his cabin, but choking smoke made him retreat. Another British guest, Simon Marsden, managed to check the cabins and wake him, and he had to shout to the crew to persuade them to launch the dive inflatables and evacuate the boat.

New 360° Underwater Camera, a Small Fortune

You might be familiar with those 360° view videos frequently used by real estate agents to give you virtual tours of properties. The VSN Mobil V360 HD Camera Kit sells for \$449, but is only water-resistant to 3 feet deep. Some enterprising engineers have found a way to clamp together a cluster of POV cameras like the GoPro for a similar effect.

The Boxfish 360 is a professional-quality 360° underwater camera with large digital sensors. Its “eyes” are three large cameras that the company claims gives



the sensor an area almost five times that of those six-action-camera rigs you might have seen. This results in sharper images shooting up to 5K ultra high-definition with better color rendition.

It has a 90-minute battery that takes only minutes change along with the camera’s memory cards. The Boxfish 360 can also record data from the dive, such as the depth it recorded at. It’s designed to work with the Boxfish ROV.

For around \$15,000, they’re yours. www.boxfishresearch.com

Low said that none of the crew tried to check the cabins or make sure everyone was present. There had been no safety briefing before depart-

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ture, and he saw no fire-safety equipment other than the single extinguisher.

Most of the guests were wearing nothing but swimwear, and only three managed to recover their bags with passports, cash, cell phones and other valuables. A fishing-boat quickly picked up everyone, and a naval vessel transported them to its base in Hurghada. Low said a fireboat tried to put out the fire, but soon gave up. "It might have been too dangerous or intense."

At the naval base, the group was given no information, but kept in a room with only "a couple of chairs and limited water and some dates to

How Safe to Fly After Diving? At Last, Some Empirical Evidence

The study of data collected in DAN Europe's Diving Safety Laboratory (DSL) "Flying bubbles" project was concluded in 2013 and merited publication in *Aviation Space and Environmental Medicine*, in addition to *Alert Diver EU* in 2015.

For the first time empirical research was used to study what happens to divers when flying after diving. And the results are somewhat surprising.

To avoid DCS brought on by cabin depressurization, there have long been recommendations for a suitable surface interval before traveling by air, but these have been based solely on theory.

For commercial and military divers, the recommended wait times before boarding a commercial plane have varied from 2 to 24 hours. For sport divers, it's been a fixed interval of 24 or 48 hours, depending on whether it was after a single dive, a series of repetitive dives, or a decompression-stop dive.

Dr. Danilo Cialoni and Massimo Pieri of the DAN Diving Safety Laboratory team administered cardiac echo tests to divers during a flight after a dive trip. They involved DAN Europe Research, in particular Prof. Alessandro Marroni and Prof. Costantino Balestra. Airline safety rules were a challenge, and the cooperation of the airline was fundamental in getting electromagnetic interference certification in order to do the cardio echo tests in flight.

The research subjects flew between Milan (Italy) and the Maldives. The methodology involved several control phases, including tests during the outbound flight and after each dive during a week's dive trip. The subjects were divided into three categories: those who did not

develop bubbles, those who occasionally developed bubbles, and those "bubble-prone" divers who developed bubbles after every dive.

Before departure from Male's airport, the researchers conducted more tests, and even more during the return flight to Milan, when they monitored all the divers by cardiac echo and Doppler tests in 30, 60 and 90-minute intervals after the aircraft reached cruising altitude.

The results indicated that some divers are more 'bubble-prone' than others. The majority of divers developed no bubbles during the return flight after a 24-hour interval between diving and flying. But, some did. The highest bubble levels were seen 30 minutes after reaching cruising altitude. For safety, these divers would need a longer surface interval before flying or even the preventative measure of breathing normobaric oxygen before flying.

So what does the study's outcome mean for divers? Prof. Marroni said, "We are headed straight toward a future where the individual component can influence the mathematic model, placing greater emphasis on the practical application of research in diving safety." In other words, the day may come when our dive computers can be programmed with data reflecting our own individual body processes.

But until then, there are no means by which an individual diver can determine how bubble-prone he might be without subjecting himself to the same rigorous test regime, which is impossible. So, for the time being, add a few more hours to your time between surfacing from the sea and lifting off into the atmosphere.



eat.” Eventually, a representative from the British consulate took them to a hotel, assuring them that the boat operator would pay for accommodations and reimburse them.

“It was a run-down building with no toiletries including paper, towels, lights or air-conditioning,” said Low. “We had to find our own food and water for the first night with the limited funds saved from the three bags.” The company did not contact them.

After the dive guide had complained to the operator, the divers were eventually moved to a better hotel, and a woman who was on the boat donated clothes and shoes from her store in Hurghada.

The *Overseas* was towed back to Hurghada and grounded on a sandbank, where another boat moored alongside the wreck, and their divers scavenged it. A few days later, when the guests were taken to the boat, they found opened bags and only a few waterlogged and broken items. Only two of the passengers recovered their passports, but money and other valuables were missing. The Egyptian dive-guide who later dived the wreck in search of property found all the cabins empty. With missing papers, it took the guests up to a week to clear immigration and return home.

Apparently, the operator of the liveaboard, Ibrahim Ahmed Galal, has promised the group to compensate them for the lost trip “but only if they signed a contract to release him from any liability,” which they refused to do.

The seas are filled with inexpensive liveaboards for divers. If you decide to book a budget live-aboard trip, do your research, and for your own safety, make sure that your boat is not only fit to carry passengers, but also has firefighting and other safety equipment on board.

(from an interview with Ben Low and other sources)

Flotsam & Jetsam

Antibiotic Confusion: Ben admits to making an editing error in our monthly newsletter. Travel Advice from Lynda Durfee should have read, “generic Keflex and a Z-pack”. Keflex is Cephalexin. A Z-Pak is azithromycin. They are two different antibiotics. We thank all those that wrote in to tell us.

Cooper’s Treasures. Astronaut Gordon Cooper created a map of the ocean floor to identify Cold War nuclear threats, but today it’s being used for finding centuries-old wrecks. Already, experts have identified five colonial period wreck sites. An anchor dated between 1492 and 1550 and likely to have come from a vessel the size of one of those used by Columbus has been discovered in the Turks & Caicos Islands and was featured on Discovery Channel.

DAN Mileage Restriction. We erred when we reported the 50-mile (80km) restriction to DAN cover. After trawling through the DAN Insurance Handbook, it appears that restriction applies to diving vacation cancellation, non-diving accident medi-

cal insurance, diving vacation interruption benefit and Travel Assist benefit on the basic member’s policy, not actual diving accidents.

You Swallowed What? You certainly swallowed seawater while diving, but there’s more to it than water? Photographer David Littschwager photographed a handful of seawater and magnified it 25 times. In the few drops of water captured off Kona, Hawaii, he encountered larvae of marine worms, cyanobacteria that help to produce oxygen, crab larvae, copepods (a shrimp-like crustacean that is a food source for many fish), fish eggs, and chaetognaths — a predatory form of zooplankton that can inject a paralytic venom. It doesn’t bear thinking about, does it? Maybe next time you’re in the water, please keep your mouth shut!

Fake News Again. More than 13 million people clicked on YouTube footage of an ‘adult film’ actress getting bitten by a shark during a film shoot off West Palm Beach, but it seems to have been a contrived publicity stunt. Bryce Roher of Florida Shark Diving says he had been contacted previously by the company, saying it wanted to stage the shark bite. He wanted no part of it. Ryan Walton of Deep Obsession Charters said it was obviously faked and was shocked that so many news outlets picked up

on it, but that “the shock factor made you want to believe it.” He points out that the girl was inside a cage yet the cameraman was not.

Cayman Cruelty. The *Telegraph* reports that Carnival Cruise Line, one of the world’s biggest cruise companies, has come under fire for sending tens of thousands of its passengers every year on excursions to the Cayman Turtle Center: Island Wildlife Encounter, where endangered turtles are allegedly subjected to appalling living conditions and are exploited in the name of tourist entertainment, including as props for selfies.

Shark Attacks California Diver’s Kayak. Are you one of those divers who uses a kayak to get to where you want to dive? Brian Correiar was doing exactly that in Monterey Bay on May 28 when his kayak was attacked by a great white shark. Video taken from the shore shows him swimming carefully backwards as the shark started to swim toward him with his kayak still lodged in his jaws. Unable reach the Coast Guard with his VHF/GPS, he was pulled from the water by a passing yacht captain.

First Female Pakistani Diving Instructor. Life can be fairly limited for women in Muslim-dominated Pakistan, but Rosheen Khan has broken those invisible barriers to become the country’s first female diving instructor. Featured in a documentary by Nameera Ahmed, made with the intention of breaking stereotypes, she recounted how her employer at the Karachi Scuba Diving Center, Yousuf Ali, had encouraged her, and now she teaches scuba diving internationally.

Calling Underwater Photographers. The Wetpixel Shootout will be held mid-June 2018 and will again pitch two teams head-to-head in an underwater photography contest at Gulen in Norway. Alex Mustard will be captaining the Lembeh Team and Kei Wilk the Gulen team. Both teams are

actively recruiting members to participate. Contact www.gulendiveresort.com or www.lembehresort.com

The Crown-of-Thorns Starfish has not gone away. Now that we’ve focused on coral bleaching, we should remember that the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish are munching their way through what’s left of the Great Barrier Reef. The problem has always been how to destroy them without helping them to propagate by division. Now tests by researchers at James Cook University have established that injecting each animal with a shot of commonly available vinegar causes them to die within 48 hours, with no impact on other marine life. Problem is, it takes a lot of diver hours to cover much territory.

How Many Divers Are There? Subscriber Ron Johnson (Katy, TX) recently went on a trip with several dive store owners to the Philippines. They were lamenting that Millennials didn’t want to learn to dive, only to check scuba off their bucket lists. They also all agreed that there were less than a million active divers in the world. What do you think? BenDDavison@undercurrent.org

Do Statue Parks Divert Attention from Bigger Issues? Robert Iglesias Priet, a researcher from the Institute of Marine Sciences and Limnology near Cancun, Mexico, thinks so. He also believes tourists are to blame for deterioration on Cancun’s reefs, due to the threat of pollution caused by waste water discharged from the hotels. This is resulting in algae increasingly covering the coral as well as the museum of sculptures. While the 7,700 square miles of the Great Barrier Reef attract close to a million visitors every year, the national park in Cancun covers only 33 square miles, yet has nearly 750,000 visitors each year. The museum diverted a third of these away from the coral, but the pollution threat continues.

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