

# undercurrent

*The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers*

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## Deefer Diving, Carriacou, Grenada

*a frozen-in-time Caribbean isle - including the diving*

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Dear Fellow Diver:

At Sharky's, our first dive of the day, we tied to the mooring ball, received a quick briefing and, with a giant stride, exited the boat. My first thought was about the visibility. It was crap. Worst I'd seen in the Caribbean. Wracked with despair, I believed my long-anticipated disaster of traveling to an under-the-radar island for diving I knew nothing about, had arrived. I looked around for my wife, expecting a through-the-mask glare of "great job planning my birthday dive trip." We exchanged OK hand signals, but she immediately returned to looking intently ahead at something I couldn't discern. That's when I realized: We were in a huge cloud of tiny fish. Innumerable eighth-of-an-inch-long fish of indeterminate species. Concentrating on some close to my mask, I saw they were swimming madly but going nowhere. The volume of life was a truly awesome sight.

When we cleared the fish soup, visibility in the 81-degree water increased to 75 feet. I spotted a scorpionfish immediately. The usual Caribbean fish, aside from groupers, were abundant. A jumbo nurse shark and a pair of eagle rays flew by me at my maximum depth of 63 feet. Surfacing after just under an hour, my mood had done a 180-degree turn.

This dive trip was based on parameters set by my wife: For her mile-



Deefer Diving's MV Phoenix



stone birthday, she wanted an April dive trip somewhere "new" in the Caribbean. So, my trip research started with Undercurrent. A mention in "Flotsam and Jetsam" about Deeper Diving on the island of Carriacou, off the north-west coast of Grenada, piqued my curiosity; we had dived and enjoyed both Grenada and St. Vincent. Time constraints and lack of information about Carriacou required my immediate action on scheduling the entire trip. That meant making air, hotel and dive arrangements by telephone, something I hadn't done in a decade.

A call to Deeper Diving started things off. Gary Ward, the British co-proprietor, readily answered my questions. He was upbeat on Carriacou diving, but didn't give a sales pitch. He also provided hotel and restaurant recommendations, including one for Bogles Round House, a restaurant that sounded perfect for a birthday dinner.

Carriacou has at least six hotels. Consulting an island dive-site map and the satellite view on Google Maps, I picked Mermaid Beach Hotel for its beachfront location along Main Street through Hillsborough, Carriacou's capital and, well, its only town. A phone number with a New York City area code connected me to a friendly woman at Mermaid Beach's reservation desk. Confirmation came by email. A call to Bogles Round House quickly confirmed the birthday dinner.

The SVG Air puddle-jumper flight from Grenada to Carriacou required an actual phone conversation with an agent, although email confirmation did follow. Unease percolated -- booking a flight by phone was archaic, would the airplane and boarding procedures be, too? I started apologizing to my wife for travel headaches we were certain to encounter.

In Grenada, my sense of dread started when SVG Air issued handwritten boarding passes in a departure lounge with no PA system. The gate agent held his palm up and said only, "Not you" to me when he summoned others for the Carriacou flight. No further information was given to the group denied boarding, as our flight departed without us. The departure-lounge businesses began closing shop for the day, but a woman who worked for the Grenadine government assured us SVG Air would add a flight. Sure enough, an hour later, the aged, eight-seater, high-wing, twin-engine plane returned. My tension eased during the 20-minute flight.

Being more than an hour late, I was surprised to find the cab driver who Gary at Deeper Diving had arranged for us waiting patiently in the parking lot. But the five-minute drive to Mermaid Beach Hotel ended at a locked and unanswered door. The notice taped to the window inaccurately stated lobby hours were until 10 p.m. But before dismay set in again, a waitress from the attached restaurant, Callaloo, appeared, produced a room key and said Mr. Simon, the hotel manager, went home early.

Disaster had not yet been fully averted. Our room, on the first floor off the interior courtyard, had no view. My fault: I had chosen the lowest end of room options over the phone. I could sense my wife's disappointment. Not good. I chased down the waitress, and Mr. Simon was quickly summoned. We were immediately relocated to a high-ceilinged room with queen bed on the top (second) floor, overlooking the beach with a sunset view. The clean, recently renovated rooms have tiled bathrooms with glass-enclosed showers and plenty of hot water, but little storage aside from a small hanging closet. I repurposed the small desk as the underwater camera table, and we kept fruits and beverages in the mini-refrigerator.

Our punctual cab driver was again waiting in the driveway when we emerged with our gear bags. We had to lug our gear across Main Street to the beach, then wade to the

boat, moored 25 yards offshore in chest-deep water, and hand up our gear to Andre and Bob, our divemaster and boat skipper who alternated duties (they did carry the aluminum-80 tanks and gear for women and senior divers from the shop). The MV Phoenix was a no-frills, flat-top, 25-foot catamaran with twin outboards, accessed by an aluminum pipe ladder at the rear between the pull-start engines. No dive platform, head or freshwater rinse tank. Just a bench with tank holders on each side, a cooler and a stand-up forward center console under the sail-fabric roofed area. But it was in good condition with all required safety equipment. I later learned crew cleaned it every morning of nightly-deposited seagull dung.



**“Fish Soup” at Sharky’s**

Deefer Diving occupies a well-worn but welcoming open-air building across the street from the beach. When I had called from home and offered a credit card to reserve, Gary, a stocky, jolly guy in his 40s or 50s, said he would just “pencil us in the book.” His English wife, Alex, greeted us by name, and it took just five minutes to hand in pre-completed paperwork and certification cards, and get weights. The only other divers that week were an older couple from England named Charles and Diana -- at least it would be easy to remember their names.

All our dives were about an hour long, and my deepest dive was 75 feet; going much deeper southwest of town would require a shovel. There’s no shore diving, because Deefer is near Hillsborough’s busy port, and reefs are far offshore. But reef conditions are good to very good for the Caribbean, with abundant soft coral and sea life. After a giant stride off the boat for a drift from White Sand Beach to Cistern Point, I spotted spiny lobsters everywhere, including a cluster of 10 youngsters staring back at me from under an overhang. A huge, three-inch-long banded coral shrimp swam figure-eights next to a juvenile spotted drumfish doing the same. Several species of morays poked their heads out all over the reef, looking like a giant game of Whac-a-Mole.

We quickly settled into a routine. Up with the sun, we descended the back stair to Callaloo’s waterfront patio. I always opted for the Carriacou Breakfast: fresh juice from island fruits, coffee, two eggs, fried plantains and the “saltfish and bake” of salted cod and fresh breadcakes for approximately US\$9. The pleasant staff served meals at a “relaxed” pace, a Caribbean constant that always makes the New Yorker in me crazy.

## Pirates of the Caribbean

Centuries after Blackbeard’s cannons fell silent and the Jolly Roger flag was driven out of the rum ports, the southern Caribbean is confronting a not-so-romantic resurgence of pirates. This is due mainly to the economic hardships in Venezuela these days.

The nonprofit Oceans Beyond Piracy studied the incidents recorded by a Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard vessel between Trinidad and Venezuela’s northeast coast, and noted 71 major incidents during 2017, including hijacking and robbery of merchant vessels and private yachts. The pirates simply wait for the Coast Guard vessel to vanish over the horizon before acting.

In April, masked men boarded four fishing boats from neighboring Guyana and murdered 15 of the

20-man crew. A Trinidad fisherman was held hostage by Spanish-speaking pirates, who contacted his brother to pay \$500 ransom. There have been piracy reports over the past 18 months off the coasts of Honduras, Haiti and St. Lucia. In Venezuela, the country’s Coast Guard officers have boarded anchored vessels and demanded money and food.

So far, divers should have no concern because they rarely frequent areas where pirates have been active -- though Venezuela’s Los Roques is a good diving destination -- but it’s something we’ll keep an eye on for you. However, it does seem as if the waters around Venezuela are becoming as risky as those around Somalia.



**Room with a View at Mermaid Beach Hotel**

We knew it was time to finish breakfast when we saw uniformed schoolchildren exit the ferry from Petite Martinique, the island next door, and scamper down the city dock. Our commute to the dive shop was a barefoot walk along the beach.

On a morning dive at Barracuda Point, besides seeing another big nurse shark and plentiful lobsters, I encountered a small school of squid. I'm always amused at how they hover and stare back at me like I'm an alien from another planet. On the second dive, at Whirlpool, I saw the "Carriacou Holy Trinity" -- a big nurse shark, turtle and eagle ray. Divemaster Bob, a British Army veteran who started at Deeper as an intern, was ecstatic. I was more excited by the small tugboat wreck with a lobster living in the bilge that would have easily fed six people.

Volcanic bubbles percolated from the seabed in one spot along the lush reef. While Andre moored the boat, I saw eight to ten eagle rays patrolling the shallows, collecting a free meal from local fishermen gutting their catch.

Deeper scheduled two morning dives, one afternoon dive by request, and two night dives per week. Our 8:30 a.m. start got us back to the shop by lunchtime, usually spent eating fresh fish and smoothies at the Kayak Kafe. Our one afternoon dive took us to Sandy Island Gardens. We were the only divers aboard, aside from divemaster Andre (who was so cold in Caribbean waters, he wore a vest under a full wetsuit), and we spent our dive at 68 feet, spotting multiple spiny lobsters and baby nurse sharks.

Back at the dive shop, we witnessed some pro-bono training that Deeper Diving was providing a local, who will become Carriacou's first female divemaster. The Wards are fully engaged with the island community on every level. Divemaster/skipper Andre Mckie is the youngest of three brothers trained to work there. We eschewed the Friday afternoon dive to give the dive team some time off and allow me some face time with local bartenders. More than once, I enjoyed sea breezes at La Playa Beach Bar, at the end of a dirt road on the north end of town. The Carib beers were cold, the rum punches powerful.

We often had the bars, dive boat and beach to ourselves, as our visit was very out-of-season. But Hillsborough is a town with no hustle or bustle. Many buildings along Main Street were abandoned or boarded up. Occupied buildings were sometimes dilapidated, and shopkeepers didn't attempt to lure tourist dollars. The town is quiet, except for the town pier area, which features an illegal (and shady-looking) casino inside a bar across from police headquarters. Indeed, this is the old Caribbean, where time stands still.

My wife's birthday started with a rainbow over Sandy Island, and an eagle ray breaching five feet from the dive boat as we boarded. We were again the only divers, so we decided to take the PADI Caribbean Lionfish Containment course. After one hour of classroom work at a picnic table on Deeper's deck, we practiced hovering buoyancy (including inverted), obstacle course navigation and target shooting with Hawaiian slings. Spotting a lionfish, I tightened the rubber bands on my sling, put the trident tip close to its head and released. Andre carried the keeper tubes and cautiously stored my catch. Our three dives that day resulted in approximately 60 lionfish removed from the Caribbean, cleaned and donated by Alex to the local school for lunches.

## *Carriacou, Grenada*

Diving (Experienced)..... ★★★★★  
 Diving (Beginners)..... ★★★★★  
 Snorkeling ..... ★★★  
 Accommodations..... ★★★★★  
 Food..... ★★★★★  
 Services and attitude ..... ★★★★★  
 Money's worth..... ★★★★★

★= poor ★★★★★= excellent

*Caribbean scale*

## The Divers Most At Risk for Heart Attacks

American divers don't get old. We just get bigger medical bills and cosmetic surgery. But elsewhere in the world, there is concern that older, overweight divers should shed those extra pounds they've put on since they were in their sporting prime -- to avoid underwater heart attacks.

Dr. Peter Buzzacott of the University of Western Australia published a study in the *European Journal of Preventative Cardiology*, suggesting that those divers who learned to dive a long time ago and are now old, overweight, and have high blood pressure and high cholesterol, are at increased risk of dying. It is estimated that 3.3 million Americans and 2.8 million Europeans will scuba dive during 2018, and while deaths from diving overall are rare, the percentage that can be attributed to cardiac problems is rising.

From 1989 to 2015, the proportion of dive fatali-

ties involving those in the age range 50-59 increased steadily from 15 percent to 35 percent, while fatalities involving those older soared from 5 percent to 20 percent. Cardiac events are now second only to drowning as the leading cause of death.

Buzzacott advised all divers to have routine fitness assessments with their doctor, and tackle risk factors that otherwise could lead to a fatal cardiac event while diving. He notes, "Never before in history have so many people been exposing themselves to these extraordinary environmental stresses, and, for the first time ever, we now have a large number of people who have spent their entire lives regularly scuba diving."

Ray Woolley, the world's oldest diver, is now 95 and still going, so make sure you stay in equally good shape and aim to grab his record.

We taxied to the spectacular Bogles Round House Restaurant, high on a bluff overlooking the sea, for my wife's birthday dinner. The offerings, served by manager and chef Roxanne Rock, were fantastic, even by our New Yorker standards. We oohed and aahed over the fresh mahi-mahi with local produce (\$19.50) and lamb shank braised in red wine and served with creamed potatoes (\$30); several good wines were available.

On our final morning, I watched from our room's balcony as an eagle ray, five feet from the water's edge, swam a search pattern looking for breakfast. Our final dive, took us back to Sharky's. I found myself under a sun-blocking school of two-inch silver-sides, marveling at the metallic sheet undulating with the surge, our bubbles and attacks by predators amongst volcanic boulders at the base of a cliff.

I loved Carriacou's easy, serene dives on reefs with an abundance of life and schools of fish. The only negative was seeing locals illegally and regularly spearfishing, which may explain the absence of groupers. While we visited in low season, Carriacou is relatively inexpensive year-round. Hillsborough needs a coat of paint and potholes filled, but that's the charm of this relaxing spot. I was proud of myself for booking this trip by mostly phone calls, but it took a while to shake the too-good-to-be-true travel anxiety. I've decided that using an experienced agent is less stressful, and I've already used my trusty agency's services for our two next dive vacations.

-- R.A.M.

Our Undercover Diver's Bio: "I was exposed to diving at a young age by my father and Jacques Cousteau, and got certified in 1977. Aside from drysuit diving in Silfra, Iceland, I gave up cold-water diving, preferring the Caribbean, Yucatan, Micronesia and the Philippines, and am always accompanied by my lovely wife-buddy. I only feel truly stress-free at work when I have two dive trips planned ahead."



**Divers Compass:** American Airlines from JFK to Grenada via Miami cost \$610 per person in first class; the SVG Air puddle-jumper to Carriacou was \$120 round-trip . . . Deefer Diving offered a 10-tank package deal for \$470, the lionfish training was \$160 and night dives were \$75; nitrox was available but we didn't partake, and my guess is it's expensive, because oxygen must be shipped from Grenada . . . Mermaid Beach Hotel was \$149 per night for a queen room with an ocean view; a standard twin is \$107 . . . English is the official language . . . U.S. dollars are widely accepted, although a local banking rule means

damaged bills aren't accepted; the exchange rate is US\$1 = 2.67 Eastern Caribbean Dollars . . . a hyperbaric chamber was installed last year at St George's University on Grenada . . . Websites: Deefer Diving - [www.deeferdiving.com](http://www.deeferdiving.com); Mermaid Beach Hotel - [www.mermaidhotelcarriacou.com](http://www.mermaidhotelcarriacou.com)

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## Bonaire, Cozumel, Cuba, Fiji, Palau . . .

### *spear tossers, baggage restrictions and thieving crews*

We live in an imperfect world, and when you're off diving in unfamiliar territory, those imperfections can catch you off guard. We publish selective comments from our readers that can help you anticipate problems before they arise, so your diving holiday can be worry-free.

At the same time, you shouldn't limit your diving explorations. Bonaire is one place where it makes sense to get off the beaten track . . .

**Bonaire's East End.** Rather than stick with the standard dive operators along the west side of Bonaire, Mary McCombie (New Haven, CT) drove over to the little-dived east side of Sorobon in June. "East Coast Diving operators Martijn and Bob are excellent naturalists, instructors and captains, and they are warm, pleasant, and easygoing. The boat is a rigid-bottomed inflatable with an ingenious feature: a section that can be deflated and removed so a ladder can be attached for divers to enter the boat after the dive. Funchi's Reef was lush with stony and soft corals, really stunning, and there were a number of large green turtles cruising around, but my favorite sight was eagle rays in singles and groups. Turtle City, just north of our first site, was lousy with green turtles, sleeping and cruising, and I stopped counting after 40. The reef was again lush and healthy, and near the end of the dive, we drifted to The Fingers, a site with massive dense ridges of stony corals. It was great to see after diving the west coast, where storm damage and runoff has had its predictable effects on the reef. We also saw a hogfish, a common sight in the northern Caribbean, but profoundly rare on Bonaire.

"It cost \$120 for two tanks per person, plus tip, and was well worth the price. Nice operation, gorgeous reef and some big animals -- what is not to like?" ([www.bonaireeastcoastdiving.com](http://www.bonaireeastcoastdiving.com))

**Concerns about Cozumel.** Aldora has been a long-time favorite of *Undercurrent* readers, including Mark Magers (San Antonio, Jalisco, Mexico), but he had a few issues on his April trip there and

hopes they'll make a few corrections. While they can't do much about the diminishing marine life, he didn't like that Aldora gave women smaller tanks than the men, without asking about air consumption. "The pairing of divers felt a bit haphazard -- one day we were matched with divers of similar experience to ours, another day with people who had much poorer dive skills. Once we had to wait almost 90 minutes for two new divers to arrive on a ferry from Tulum (offered as a "reason" why they were late -- as if that mattered?), which significantly delayed our departure. We dove with the two tardy divers, and they were terrible -- poor buoyancy control, dangling hoses and gear, banging into coral while swimming upside down to 'blow bubbles' and doing flips (!), actually grabbing coral and sponges. The divemaster never said a word to them. We aren't sure he noticed, because he rarely looked around to see what was happening.

"We dove with three different divemasters; the briefings were very varied and generally not thorough; some excluded basic things like communicating air and deco, and what profile to expect. Not sure what is going on with Aldora, but . . . we hope this experience was an aberration."

Magers also saw a lot of boats loaded with spears, pole hooks and scuba tanks, and he wondered if they were headed into the marine park that "we pay \$2-\$3 per day per diver to 'protect.' We never once saw a boat or officer enforcing anything, or checking for the wristbands we paid for. People in the dive industry, as well as longtime, frequent visitors to Cozumel, said environmental protection had gotten worse and that the economic driver of grouper and lobster on local menus (also eaten by divers, not just cruisers) has made it bad for the reef's denizens. We noticed this on our dives -- few lobster or grouper, fewer fish in general. Even something as simple as plastic straws -- they are everywhere on Cozumel -- and ubiquitous styrofoam containers for all takeaway food suggest a lack of commitment."

## Help Indonesia Recover from Earthquake Disaster

Jared Herb of Manta Dive on the island of Gili Trawangan, reports from Bali, where he fled for safety, that an earthquake last month has done serious damage in Indonesia's Gili Islands. But it is even worse in nearby Lombok, where many of the staff from Gili dive centers live -- most of their homes were destroyed.

The *Guardian* reports the earthquake, which centered on northern Lombok, left at least 321 people dead, 1,033 seriously injured and 270,000 people displaced from their homes. Indonesia's disaster and rescue agencies expect the death toll to rise further.

The sudden exodus of tourists from the islands leaves the future of diving uncertain. Sander Buis, the Dutch owner of Oceans 5 Dive on Gili Air, said that

there was nobody left. "Just hundreds of bikes dumped at the airport." As of now, diving in the Gilis and Lombok is canceled while dive shop staffers focus on efforts to raise money for basic supplies for their families. Teams from all the dive shops are doing clean up, in Lombok running supplies, and in Bali coordinating those supplies.

Help with the relief effort by giving donations to vetted nonprofits that are helping local organizations buy supplies and start rebuilding efforts, such as Red Cross ([www.redcross.org.au/campaigns/lombok-indonesia-earthquake-appeal](http://www.redcross.org.au/campaigns/lombok-indonesia-earthquake-appeal)), CARE ([www.care.org.au/appeals/bali-lombok-earthquake-emergency](http://www.care.org.au/appeals/bali-lombok-earthquake-emergency)) and Global Giving ([www.globalgiving.org/projects/indonesia-earthquake-relief-fund](http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/indonesia-earthquake-relief-fund)).

*Undercurrent* readers do report a serious decline in marine life in Cozumel waters, which, sadly, is to be expected with increased runoff, sewage, cruise ship visits, warming waters and other human-induced change. Shawn McDermott (Melbourne, FL), notes, "I'm told that 150 dive boats now have marine park licenses. Even if you get out early, there can be more than 100 divers in the water by the end of the dive, mostly bouncing off the bottom, running into the reef and pointing their POV cameras. There's not much to shoot anymore."

**Luggage Restrictions on Cuba Flights.** Be warned that American Airlines can impose severe baggage restrictions on its flights, even if the ticket agents can't explain why. Bruce Carlson (Ewa Beach, HI) was devastated that, when checking in with his wife at Miami for a flight to Camaguey in May, they were told they were not allowed to check in the typical two bags per passenger. "We spent an hour repacking, with our gear all over the terminal floor. In the end, we left our camera gear behind. To add insult to injury, on the return trip from the same airport using the same plane, the Cuban AA agent said we would be allowed to check our two bags. He had no idea why only one bag was allowed on the inbound flight to Cuba."

American Airlines' website currently states that outbound flights to Cuba charge \$25 for the first bag and \$40 for the second, while the same two bags on inbound flights back to the U.S. are free. There are also specific restrictions with carry-on and checked baggage for various Caribbean islands, and they may vary, so check before you

start packing for your trip. ([www.aa.com/i18n/travel-info/baggage/checked-baggage-policy.jsp](http://www.aa.com/i18n/travel-info/baggage/checked-baggage-policy.jsp))

**Top-Notch Service in Lembeh.** It's common for Asia-Pacific flights to get you to your destination at zero dark thirty, with hours to kill before you can get to the dive resort. Henry O. Ziller (Conifer, CO) faced that situation during his May trip to Bastianos Dive Resort on Indonesia's Lembeh Island, but the staff there went the extra mile. "We bought tickets months ago on Garuda Indonesia Airlines, with a direct flight to Manado from Denpasar, but alas, two weeks before we started the trip, they canceled that flight and routed us through Jakarta. Our flight was delayed so we arrived at Manado at 1 a.m. I thought we would have to spend the night in a local hotel, but there was a Bastianos driver waiting for us with a sign. The drive to Bitung took one hour and 45 minutes; then it is a 15-minute boat ride to Lembeh Island. Front desk staff was waiting for us at 3 a.m. to show us to our room and deliver our bags. There is still great service in some parts of the world." ([www.bastianos.com](http://www.bastianos.com))

**Health Hazard Tips.** While Ziller couldn't control the flights to Indonesia, he could change the outcome of diving in the nutrient-rich waters of Lembeh Strait, which carries a health hazard. "During our trip to Lembeh in 2010, we both experienced ear infections, so since that time, we have carried a 50/50 mixture of white vinegar and rubbing alcohol. We use it after most dives in all parts of the world now."

David E. Reubush (Toano, VA) swears by the antibiotic Cipro. He was at the Walindi Plantation

Resort in Papua New Guinea last March, during which a trio of California divers had a problem with diarrhea. "I learned a long time ago to travel with Cipro, which usually fixes any problem with a single dose. I personally did not have a problem." [www.walindifebrina.com](http://www.walindifebrina.com)

**Watch Out for Spears.** And Reubush has another story to tell. Papua New Guinea, still a wild and wooly country, had a few diving disappointments, but Alan Raabe, the exemplary captain of the FeBrina, made good in spades. Reubush joined a trip led by Burt Jones and Maurine Shimlock to dive their way across the Solomon Sea to Milne Bay and end in Alotau, at PNG's southeast point.

"Milne Bay is renowned as a macro destination, so I thought this would be a great trip. Unfortunately, about a week and a half before we were scheduled to leave, Alan told us it was too dangerous in the Alotau region (there are active pirates in those waters), so we would now be doing an exploratory trip along the south coast of New Britain. After reading newspaper reports of what was happening around Alotau, I think Alan made the right decision. While the diving along New Britain was not bad, it was definitely not up to my expectations.

At the southernmost point, even though Alan had cleared our diving with the local chief, we got run off by a local who showed up one day on the back of the boat with a spear, threatening bodily harm for our diving on 'his' reef. Alan gave up on the exploration, we returned the way we came and dove many of the same sites we had done on the way down. At the end of the trip, Alan apologized for all that had happened, and told us we could return at any time in the next three years for free. I think he made the best of a bad situation that was out of his control and, with the offer, he went beyond what I expected." ([www.walindifebrina.com](http://www.walindifebrina.com))

**Bad Nitrox Management in Fiji.** Dive shop managers, what's going on there? John Miller (Lubbock, TX) was horrified by the nitrox procedures at Beqa Lagoon Resort, a PADI operation, during a visit in May. "Two of my guests were not nitrox-certified, yet they dived on EAN32 all week, as did a couple of other new divers who weren't EAN certified. I say EAN32, as that is what the shop said it makes. However, without any analyzers available to verify that, we had to take them at their word. Not once were we required to fill a nitrox logout with maximum operating depth or other basic information. Many in my group didn't even know how to set

## Is Your Mouthpiece Causing You Pain?

Do you get pain in the jaw joint or ears after a long dive? Do you suffer clicking or grinding noises in the jaw joint, or sometimes suffer difficulty opening or closing your mouth? Do you suffer discomfort while chewing, or sometimes find difficulty in clearing your ears? If you yawn carelessly, can you find that your jaw gets stuck? Worse still, do any of those symptoms combine with a feeling of nausea or dizziness?

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ), or jaw joint, is a hinged and gliding joint, and is the most constantly used joint in the body. Positioned as it is forward of the ear, you can feel it by putting a finger against it and moving your jaw up and down or side to side.

Temporomandibular dysfunction (TMD) is not specifically associated with diving, but some scientific studies have shown that the prevalence is likely to be exacerbated by use of a traditional scuba mouthpiece for long periods, and that women are more likely to suffer with TMD than men. The harder you grip the regulator mouthpiece with your teeth, the more likely you are to encounter problems, because the jaw is open and pushed forward, and a twisting intermediate

hose can add further grief. Do you find that you chew your way through regulator mouthpieces?

So, what's a solution? Instead of using a traditional regulator mouthpiece that you need to bite, swap your mouthpiece for one that you don't. Aqua Lung has a Comfobite mouthpiece (around \$12) that hangs on the front teeth instead of being gripped by the molars. If you don't consider your front teeth resilient enough, what about one of those moldable Mares Jax mouthpieces (around \$24) that you heat up and fit to suit your teeth, almost like a gum shield, so that you don't really need to bite down on it? It's the same idea as the SeaCure Custom Mouthpiece, which was created by an orthodontist and recently lost its patent.

Although TMD in diving has been studied over the years, it is not generally known about by divers, and not taught as a diving disorder. However, we should try to make our diving experiences as comfortable as possible and avoid this possible painful result of using an inappropriate mouthpiece. Your local dive store will be able to help.

*-- Condensed version of an article in the British magazine Scuba*

their computers, and others were diving without computers. On our three-tank dive, they did not have enough tanks of air for those not wanting nitrox or not certified for it, and yet they offer nitrox to those not certified. Those of us who did not request nitrox, accommodated the crew by accepting it, so they would be able to give 21% to the others. Readers who are instructors know how this issue is a major standards violation and simply not acceptable under any circumstances."

**On-Board Theft:** Another bad story about diving in Fiji comes from Herve Hosek (Corpus Christi, TX). He reports, "While two divers were separated from the rest of us by a current, two crew on the boat were busy stealing \$200 from my wallet and going through the bag of another diver while the boat ladder was up, preventing those two returning divers from getting back on the boat. The dive shop manager wasn't on site when we went to report. His answer to our email was to just question the veracity of our story, without apologizing." Given the circumstances, we find it improper to report the hotel name, but they know who they are and what staffer is the culprit.

**Blue Corner Blues in Palau.** Rose Mueller (Houston, TX), who has visited the archipelago 27 times, stayed in April at Palau Pacific Resort and dived with Splash Dive Center. She can remember

diving with 50 or 60 sharks at Blue Corner, but apparently, as she observed on this trip, those days are long gone. Maybe it's connected with global water temperature rises.

Curtis Kates (Los Angeles, CA) did the same itinerary in May and also made similar comments. "The ocean was very warm on this trip, and currents and sea conditions were light and calm; therefore, we did not have the usual, high-thrill, reef-hook dives at Blue Corner. However, dropping down to 100-120 feet, I could see an impressive slew of grey reef sharks circling in the slightly colder water." ([www.palauppr.com](http://www.palauppr.com); [www.splash-palau.com](http://www.splash-palau.com))

**And a Palau Travel Tip.** Mark Etter (Lititz, PA) was happy with his May trip and says, "You really must try a local tour with Nan, who works at the Palau Central hotel. He took me on a private tour of the island, including a magnificent wood-carving shop, the village where he grew up, the Badrulchau monoliths, Japanese cannons, a marine biology research facility and the National Capital Building. We had a great lunch in the north at Okemii Cafe. Fantastic!" ([www.palaucentral.com](http://www.palaucentral.com))

And that's the news for this month. We wish you good diving -- and keep your travel reports coming.

-- Ben Davison

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## Dive Industry, Stop with the Plastic

*and how you, our fellow divers, can help*

Despite our continuing efforts to get the diving industry to take the problems of single-use plastic seriously (see our January, May and July issues so far this year) most equipment manufacturers continue to employ unnecessary plastic packaging of their products.

There is *a lot* of plastic in the ocean. It comes in all shapes, forms and sizes, it is found floating on the surface, suspended in the water column or littering the ocean floor, and it eventually washes up on beaches around the world, wreaking havoc with marine life in all these ecosystems.

According to a scientific report released by the California nonprofit Plastic Oceans, marine plastic debris has impacted over 600 marine species from the bottom to the top of the food chain, many dying a slow, agonizing death. The Greenpeace report, "Plastic Debris in the World's Oceans," states, "At

least 267 different species are known to have suffered from entanglement or ingestion of marine debris including seabirds, turtles, seals, sea lions, whales and fish. The scale of contamination of the marine environment by plastic debris is vast. It is found floating in all the world's oceans, everywhere from polar regions to the equator."

Here at *Undercurrent*, we think the diving industry should take a lead on this issue and eliminate single-use plastic from its packaging of dive equipment.

As we mentioned in July's article, a few small companies have been bold enough to take the problem on board, but apart from Mares (and an unfulfilled promise from Aqualung and Scubapro to get back to us), the silence from the other manufacturers has been deafening -- and disappointing.

So it is time for you to take action. Contact these industry leaders and ask what their plans are for reducing the amount of plastic they use in their packaging. If you want to protect our oceans, this is where you must start. Please act now.

Send emails to:

\* Dean Garraffa, president of Atomic Aquatics - [dean.garaffa@huishoutdoors.com](mailto:dean.garaffa@huishoutdoors.com)

\* Franco Ravano, president of Cressi USA - [franco.ravano@cressiusa.com](mailto:franco.ravano@cressiusa.com)

\* Don Rockwell, president of Aqua Lung - [drockwell@aqualung.com](mailto:drockwell@aqualung.com)

\* Joseph Stella, group vice-president at Scubapro - [joe.stella@johnsonoutdoors.com](mailto:joe.stella@johnsonoutdoors.com)

Another option is to write a public comment or send a direct message to a brand on its Facebook page, asking them about plastics in packaging and

alerting other divers who follow them on social media to the issue.

\* Aqua Lung - [www.facebook.com/aqualungdivers](http://www.facebook.com/aqualungdivers)

\* Atomic Aquatics - [www.facebook.com/atomicaquatics](http://www.facebook.com/atomicaquatics)

\* Cressi - [www.facebook.com/cressigear](http://www.facebook.com/cressigear)

\* Scubapro - [www.facebook.com/Scubapro](http://www.facebook.com/Scubapro).

Uwatec

\* Seac - [www.facebook.com/SeacOfficialPage](http://www.facebook.com/SeacOfficialPage)

\* Stahlsac - [www.facebook.com/stahlsacbags](http://www.facebook.com/stahlsacbags)

\* Waterproof - [www.facebook.com/Waterproof-International-135339246530351](http://www.facebook.com/Waterproof-International-135339246530351)

And keep their response -- or lack of one -- in mind the next time you're shopping for dive gear.

-- John Bantin

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## Fitness, Diving and Dehydration

### *how not to mix these three things in the wrong combination*

As times goes by, some of us are guilty of doing less exercise than we should. Others work hard at it. However, maybe those who exercise frequently should take a break from a physical fitness regime when on a scuba diving trip.

In his article about physical fitness for diving, Neal Pollock, research director at Divers Alert Network, writes that conducting intense physical exercise too close to diving activity can be problematic. "Bubble formation, while not equivalent to or a guarantee of decompression sickness, can indicate an increased risk for it. Intense physical activity -- generally with substantial muscular forces and joint loading, or the application of forces on joints -- is believed to transiently increase micronuclei activity, the presumed agent of bubble formation. Physical activity after diving may also stimulate additional bubble formation, possibly through a combination of increased micronuclei activity and increased joint forces.

Pollock recommends that intense physical training should be avoided 24 hours on either side of diving activity. "Any exercise within 24 hours of diving should involve the lowest possible joint forces." (You can read Pollock's entire article at [www.diversalertnetwork.org/medical/articles/Juggling\\_Physical\\_Exercise\\_and\\_Diving](http://www.diversalertnetwork.org/medical/articles/Juggling_Physical_Exercise_and_Diving))

Nobody would argue against keeping fit, but when a British coroner suggested this year that a police officer might have died while diving in Spain's Canary Islands last September because she was too fit, eyebrows were raised.

The coroner contended that, because Justine Barringer did a 40-minute run the night before her dive off Gran Canaria, possible dehydration might have caused a condition that triggers muscle damage, affecting organs such as the heart and kidneys.

The *Telegraph* reports that Barringer, a 44-year-old from Sittingbourne, England, lost consciousness 33 feet below the surface during an ascent on an Advanced Open Water course. She was completing her first "deep" dive to 88 feet. Attempts to revive her on the dive boat proved futile.

A subsequent post-mortem in the U.K. gave decompression sickness as the cause of death; however, it added that Barringer's recent exercise could have caused rhabdomyolysis, the breakdown of damaged skeletal muscle, which causes the release of myoglobin into the bloodstream. Myoglobin stores oxygen in your muscles. If you have too much myoglobin in your blood, it can cause kidney damage.

Simon Mitchell, head of the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Auckland and now editor of the journal *Diving and Hyperbaric*

Medicine, told *Undercurrent*, "For a fit and well person to become unconscious at 33 feet during ascent from an uneventful dive is extremely unusual. . . . It is not clear whether the ascent was normal, and the pathological basis for the speculation about rhabdomyolysis is not clear either."

Some argue that a 40-minute run would amount to little more than a warm-up for such an athlete. As usual, there are many conflicting theories offered and little actual evidence.

Was Barringer severely dehydrated when she went diving? Good hydration is especially important to scuba divers to reduce the risks associated

with diving. Some diving doctors believe most people are dehydrated most of the time.

Although we are submerged in water when we dive, breathing dried and filtered air from a scuba tank can drain water from your body with each exhalation. Added to that is the effect of sweating in tropical weather. Mild dehydration can make you feel tired. Muscle cramps and headaches follow. So, it's important to drink plenty of fresh water and add re-hydrating powder during a dive trip.

And let's not forget the deterring effect of alcohol. It inhibits the pituitary secretion of the anti-diuretic hormone (ADH), which acts on the

## Florida's Red Tide Crisis: Which Dive Spots Are Affected

A red tide is devastating southwest Florida's marine life, and thus the state's dive industry. Scientists believe the red tide, comprised of the plankton *karenia brevis*, is the culprit behind hundreds of dead sea turtles found along Florida's Gulf Coast. The bloom has varied in intensity and distribution, but at times it has stretched from Tampa Bay down to the Florida Keys, and is now threatening to move northwards to St. Petersburg. Governor Rick Scott declared a state of emergency in seven counties on August 13.

A common annual occurrence, red tide is caused by an overgrowth or accumulation of microscopic algae and often occurs in brackish or marine water, but not freshwater. The organism occurs naturally, but many water-quality scientists believe blooms now last longer and with more intensity, thanks to activities like farming and coastal development. It's the 11th month of Florida's red tide event and the state's longest continual bloom since 2006. The scientists think the cause of this red tide is water flowing from Lake Okeechobee, which formerly drained naturally through the Everglades, but is now being redirected to the coast through land reclaimed for sugar production.

More than 200 dead sea turtles, including loggerhead and Kemp's ridley, were found in Sarasota and Collier County waters in July; the Associated Press reported a tally of 300 a month later. The numbers are probably much higher, because most dead turtles decompose and sink in the ocean before they are washed ashore.

Other casualties include thousands of fish, goliath groupers, rays and even manatees - in early August, police in Venice pulled the 80th dead manatee found

in local waters this year. Florida wildlife officials say the bloom also killed a 26-foot whale shark that washed up on Sanibel Island.

So how is it affecting the diving? Mark Maddox of Scubavice Dive Center in Fort Myers told *Undercurrent* business was down about 20 percent. "It's really miserable, a really horrible time," he said. "We don't know how it's going to affect business in the long run."

Maddox says Scubavice sometimes organizes shore dives from Venice Beach but, "It's like a bouillabaisse out there, with so much dead fish and the occasional dead turtle, too."

Troy Sorensen of Dive Florida in Bradenton told us that they currently have to travel four to five miles offshore to find clear water, and they're unable to do shore dives, thanks to the stench of dead fish. Scuba Outfitters in Naples are taking their divers down to the Florida Keys or the Atlantic coast.

Conditions aren't as bad farther north, apparently. At Jim's Dive Shop in St. Petersburg, Teresa Hattaway said there was no sign of the red tide in their area. Further north, Narcosis Scuba in Tarpon Springs said it has not really affected them.

The general consensus is toxic algal blooms are harmless to divers underwater, especially if you are diving offshore. Shore dives can be more difficult. The stench of dead critters, not to mention dead plankton itself, can affect smell-sensitive divers, who may have trouble breathing.

Researchers are experimenting with various ways of killing the toxic algae but are proceeding cautiously because they don't know what effects it could have on the ecosystem.

kidneys to reabsorb water. When ADH levels drop, the kidneys do not reabsorb as much water, and instead produce more urine.

So take it easy between dives, and drink plenty of water. And when it comes to alcohol, A couple drinks before dinner on a dive trip, followed by a

good meal and water, will not cause dehydration. But add a bottle of wine to those two pre-dinner drinks and you may start causing problems for your next-day dives.

-- John Bantin

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## Deadman Diving: Not A Dive Agency Product *but are the dive agencies turning a blind eye to it?*

A number of readers wrote us to say they're concerned about this new fad, "Deadman Diving," which we mentioned in the May issue. It's apparently sweeping across Asia, and ostensibly enjoyed by many Chinese tourists. What is it exactly? Some dive centers give untrained tourists an in-ocean experience by putting them in scuba gear, minus the fins, and having dive guides drag

them around underwater and be the ones in sole control of their well-being.

Tim Williams (Dana Point, CA) told us he's witnessed something similar, with dive guides towing client divers by their extended reef hooks.

Jim Lyon (Los Gatos, CA), a PADI Master Scuba Diver Trainer, says he's seen it all too often. In the Thailand resort town of Pattaya, he saw one instructor, ostensibly conducting a Discover Scuba Diving course, dragging two Chinese clients by their tank valves, with two more holding on to the first ones' arms. When Lyon questioned him later, the instructor said PADI allowed a four-to-one ratio for training. Not like that, it doesn't!

Lyon also told us about the practice of "tea bag" diving in China. "Divemasters on the beach in Qingdao will offer a dive to tourists during the summer. Tourists pre-pay for the experience. The divemaster gears them up, drops them in and descends [with them], ay too fast for the tourists to equalize. A tourist complains of ear pain, they are all brought back up to the surface and the dive ends. They are told, 'Diving is not for you. The experience takes all of five minutes and \$60 for the unsuspecting tourist to be 'tea-bagged' -- dipped in and pulled out."

Craig Howe (Penn Valley, CA) wrote us about taking pictures while diving in Puerto Galera in the Philippines, then looking up to see a diver holding on to two others, who were waving at him. The first diver had both of them by the tank valves, and neither had fins. Howe was told they were South Koreans.

While he, too, was in the Philippines, Greg White (Cobden, IL) also witnessed a similarly odd dive near Miniloc in the Palawan Islands. Two people, fully equipped, were held by their regulators while a third (a dive guide, presumably) steered them around.

### Hawaii Fish Collectors: In a Fine Mesh

Rene Umberger, founder and executive director of For the Fishes, has written for and been quoted in *Undercurrent* about her quest to stop the commercial aquarium industry from scooping up Hawaii's reef fish and decimating their numbers. At last, she can make the victory sign.

After teaming up with other advocates, Umberger is slowing down the rate of reef fish collection after the Hawaii Supreme Court agreed with their claim that the impact of the aquarium trade was not being properly documented.

Despite fine mesh nets now being outlawed, Umberger believes some reef fish collectors continue to use them to supply the mainland aquarium trade. However, according to *The News Tribune*, the number of Hawaii reef fish caught by those with commercial marine licenses has dropped by about 80 percent since a State court ruling last year that stopped the use of fine mesh nets.

For example, Randy Fernley, owner of Coral Fish Hawaii, which sells fish and aquariums on Oahu, says sales are down 50 percent, and catches have been more difficult without the use of fine mesh nets.

Well done, Rene. We're with you all the way. Let's leave the fish in the ocean where they belong.

“I guess if people want to go back home and say they went scuba diving on vacation, then this is one way to do it,” White wrote us. “Fortunately, there wasn’t much coral in the area where we saw this, and I never saw them walk on anything. Somebody’s always looking to make a buck from anything that tourists will pay to do.”

We asked Mark Caney, vice-president of training, education and memberships for PADI Europe, Middle East and Africa, for a comment.

He told us that none of these practices comprise a PADI product, but PADI officially declined to comment. We got a similar lack of response from the dive training agency SSI, and even Britain’s BSAC was silent on the matter. Certainly we can take that as tacit approval, but why the silence?

Bret Gilliam, founder of the TDI and SDI agencies and a former board chair for NAUI, says the inherent problem lies with the rogue instructors. “Many of [them] may have had status as active

## How Travelin’ Divers Can Reduce Their Carbon Footprints

Adventurous diving is irrevocably linked to air travel, but if we divers are to be ecologically responsible, should we consider giving up globe-trotting to fin through exotic dive sites? After all, human-induced climate change is caused, by and large, by carbon emissions, and according to a study published in *Nature Climate Change* in May, eight percent of those come from global tourism. Furthermore, the industry is growing at a whopping four percent each year.

When it comes to carbon footprints, who bears responsibility for it? Travel companies, airlines, governments or us?

One method tour operators and local dive shops can use is to encourage fishermen to give up harmful activities like dynamite fishing and reap the benefits of preserving healthy reefs by employing them fishermen as boat handlers and dive guides. While there’s good research indicating the positive effect tourism can have on local people and their actions, it’s still up in the air whether the effect compensates for the overall environmental impact.

One aspect the study pays much attention to is the degree to which the economies of popular diving destinations like the Seychelles, the Maldives and Indonesia depend on tourism -- and how that international tourism accounts for up to 80 percent of those nations’ carbon emissions, along with rising sea levels.

Without giving up such travel, the answer for divers may be carbon offsets -- paying money towards projects that counter emissions, such as planting forests or improving energy efficiency. Yet Benjamin Hale, an environmental ethics professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder, sees problems with putting too much of the onus for reducing emissions onto the individual traveler. He argues against looking at carbon footprints as the sole way to determine the best environmental actions.

“Most of these global-scale environmental problems can’t be easily addressed by individual actions. They have to be addressed at the policy level,” Hale told the *Christian Science Monitor*. “Relying too much on individuals to take the right actions can mean that the individuals who care cede ground to those who don’t, allowing people who care less about the environment to take advantage of a system that enables them to do so.

“Some smaller travel operators build carbon offsets into their pricing, and international traveller-travelers should be encouraged to buy carbon offsets alongside their airline tickets,” Hale says. “They hope that although they alone won’t make much difference, the precedent might encourage bigger players in the travel market to follow the lead.”

There is no doubt that the cross-cultural understanding and the economic benefit international tourism brings to many countries and regions is a benefit that is often much less environmentally destructive than many possible alternatives.

Hale says, “It’s important to have a sense of the footprints we’re creating in the world, but there are many more factors that go into determining if that footprint is warranted or justified than just that it’s a footprint.”

Some dive travel companies have taken this into consideration and allow divers to purchase carbon-offset points that go towards ecological projects, such as planting trees, to mitigate the damage of their individual carbon footprints. You can purchase points online at sites such as [www.myclimate.org](http://www.myclimate.org) or [www.carbonfootprint.com](http://www.carbonfootprint.com). They’ll go towards carbon-offsetting projects that can also provide wider benefits to developing countries, such as ecological biodiversity, improved education, more jobs and food, and better health and well-being.

instructors with an agency, but have dropped into inactive status by not paying annual dues, or because they know that they are conducting unsanctioned diving activities. If an instructor is not a member in good standing with a training agency, the agency has no oversight and control of that individual."

"On the other hand, if any instructor with active teaching status were to conduct such activities, the agency does have jurisdiction over them. If a complaint came forward from another instructor who saw the dangerous practices, or from a customer who complained, the agency would likely have this investigated by their "Quality Assurance" department. They could decide to suspend the instructor or revoke his or her instructor rating completely. In most situations, the agency would kick the instructor out and be done with it."

"But if the unsanctioned activities, however unsafe, are making money for the rogue instructors, they will not be inclined to listen to any criticism, and probably don't care if they were ejected from the agency. They'll just continue to do what makes money, and the customers really have no idea of the insidious dangers they face. The diving industry should stand up and condemn such activities, and try to get some help and oversight from local government authorities to stop the unsafe programs."

Unfortunately, "diving as a sport is largely unregulated, and the overwhelming attitude at the top is one of 'we don't want to get involved,'" says Gilliam. "The rogue instructors know this and are taking advantage of the 'hole' in the system where they can pretty much do anything without intervention. It's a sad and very serious situation that should be met with aggressive objection."

-- John Bantin

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## In Praise of Liveboards

### *why it's more than just the diving that makes them better*

It's difficult to explain the social aspects of a liveboard dive boat to those who have never journeyed on one. After all, the vessel puts out to sea and often doesn't touch land again until the end of the trip. Divers who are accustomed to walking a resort's grounds, swimming in the pool and meeting strangers at the bar may view with incredulity and skepticism that a liveboard diver only dives, eats, looks over images taken by fellow divers, and sleeps.

Of course, those of us who thrive on the liveboard life know they provide access to dive sites unavailable to those who return to shore each evening. Stan Waterman, the iconic underwater filmmaker (five Emmys for his underwater work), is famous for saying that when you get to his age, liveboard diving is the only way to go because it is far less arduous than day boats. In many cases, your floating hotel moors over the dive site and you merely have to totter to the stern, then plop into the water. Stan, at the age of 90, made his last dive in Grand Cayman in 2013.

However, when told you will be sequestered on the vessel with people you have never met, the casual inquirer might ask, "What if I don't like them?"

It rarely happens.

Every diver on board is, first, a diver, and second, like-minded in that they certainly don't want others to have a bad trip! So there is an air of empathy for fellow travelers. Furthermore, most are of a certain age and have had endless experiences fitting into strange groups. Besides, diving is a great leveler. Whether one is a high-powered executive or a suburban schoolteacher, they meet on even terms and have plenty of underwater experiences to share. These aren't people you meet in Walmart, or at least not often.

*Where else but on a dive trip would you encounter a trial judge hanging out with an ex-Hell's Angel?*

After a day-boat dive, you may not see your diving companions until the next dive, or maybe never, because many go home the next day. (And many will be new divers.) On a liveboard, you can spend your time together (you can always retreat to your bunk or find an isolated chair on the top deck), and that's when otherwise strange alliances may be built. This can be especially gratifying if you are traveling alone.

I've met all sorts of people this way, such as the tattooed ex-Hell's Angel who shared a cabin with an elderly Canadian fellow on *MV Manta Ray* in the Red Sea. They had never met before, but became instant pals. The Hell's Angel took underwater photographs and the Canadian either modeled or spotted critters for him. He was obviously very educated, and at the end of the trip, I learned he was a trial judge. Where else but on a dive trip would you encounter a trial judge hanging out with an ex-Hell's Angel?

Some people can afford to book several trips each year, while for others it might be a trip of a lifetime, yet everyone is there for the same reason: to go diving. People from disparate locations, backgrounds and nationalities tend to bond quickly in such circumstances, and if they say travel broadens the mind, sharing a cabin with a person with a very different life can be enlightening. I've spent time with coal miners and brain surgeons in this way on *MV Sea Hunter* at Cocos Island. I've made lifelong friends with a British politician, now elevated to a Lord on *MV Royal Evolution*, and enjoyed the company of two

Florida alligator farmers on *MV Yemaya II*. I've also shared cabins with people from many countries. Everyone has a story to tell, and can add insights and value to your own knowledge. It can also build respect for those who are good at what they do, and the cultural differences, even if you had never considered such aspects before.

Getting to know people from different countries and cultures is part of the great pleasure of being in a close-knit group. On one occasion, I met two British retired senior police officers chatting up two attractive Czech women (both strong, competent divers) on the aft deck of *MV Orion* in the Maldives. One of the men asked what they did for a living in Prague. I was startled when they candidly informed us they were prostitutes! When a younger passenger, a Swiss medical student, naively asked how they could afford such an expensive trip, one replied, "That's why we're prostitutes."

-- John Bantin

## Problems with Sherwood Avid BCs Still Continue

The design problems of the Sherwood Avid BC continue to plague divers unfortunate enough to own them. We've drawn your attention before to the potential disaster of the tank separating from the BC (see our September 2016 and September 2017 issues).

Whereas the tank cambands of most BCs are threaded through slots in the buoyancy cell, Sherwood designed both its Luna and Avid BCs with separate plastic mounting points that can, under certain circumstances, shear away, allowing the tank to part company from the diver -- with dramatic consequences.

Klinger Disney (Miami, FL) wrote to *Undercurrent* in July about his 10-year-old Avid BC, and sent us a picture that dramatically reveals the problem. Thankfully, it appears that no fatalities (so far reported) have been attributed to this defect.

Disney also made us privy to the emails between him and Mike Van Hosen of Sherwood Scuba, in which he was made the offer of retailer Scuba World giving him a good price on a trade-in for a replacement -- meaning it would cost Disney between \$425 and \$475. Disney declined.

It was a similar story for Deanna Rounds, doing a shore dive with Roger Ray (Junction City, OR) near Whidbey Island, WA, in March when both of her tank camband attachments broke at the same time. Ray tells us it caused a dangerous situation when Rounds' regu-

lator was pulled from her mouth and she was dragged underwater, despite Ray's efforts to keep her afloat. Rounds contacted Sherwood's tech department but never heard back.

How long do you think a BC should last? Some of us are still successfully using other manufacturers' BCs we purchased 20 years ago.

If you own a Sherwood BC or any other that does not secure the tank camband by being threaded through slots in the buoyancy cell, we suggest you stop using it immediately. Got a comment? Write to [BenDDavison@undercurrent.org](mailto:BenDDavison@undercurrent.org)



**Look Ma, No Cambands**

# Flotsam & Jetsam

**Dolphin Murders on the Rise.** Frustrated fishermen have been taking it out on dolphins that approach their boats to snatch catches. In a disturbing trend, another dead dolphin has been found on a Mississippi beach, with a bullet through its blowhole. In an added blow, the necropsy revealed she had been pregnant with a full-term calf, which also died. From Florida to Texas, 21 dolphins have been found dead with gunshot wounds since 2002, according to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

**Rumblings about Apeks Regulators.** Tom McCarthy, owner of East Coast Wreck Diving (Freeport, NY), posted on social media that he has seen six Apeks DS4 and Tec3 regulators with runaway intermediate pressure failures in two years. Several divers have had similar experiences. Undercurrent's editor has alerted Peter Greenwell of Apeks to the online discussion and we await his comments. Write to [benddavision@undercurrent.org](mailto:benddavision@undercurrent.org) if you have had problems.

**Philippine Wreck Scandal.** Divers cried foul after an unidentified salvage operator removed remnants of the wreck of the *MV Doña Marlllyn*, near Malapascua Island. The passenger ship, owned by the now-defunct Sulpicio Lines, sank in 1988 during a typhoon; more than 300 people were killed. Since then, the wreck had become a habitat for all manner of fish and was regularly visited by divers.

**Lost Your Balls in the Ocean?** There are so many golf courses facing the ocean, but who thinks about the lost golf balls that end up there? Alex Weber, 18, from Carmel, CA, has been diving to collect these lost balls for the last two years, and so far, the high school senior has recovered more than 50,000. According to the *New York Times*, a U.S. golf course may go through 62,000 rounds of golf a year, with

with three or four balls being lost each round. That means the famed Pebble Beach course, which Weber has dived regularly, can send more than 200,000 balls into the ocean annually.

**Plastic Waste: It Gets Worse.** After 18 months testing different types of plastic in Hawaii, oceanographer Sarah-Jeanne Royer found that the material used to make shopping bags produces the greatest amount of methane, a climate-warming gas. After 212 days in the sun, it emitted 176 times more methane than it did at the start.

**Use T-Shirts Instead.** While the island of Dominica has now banned all single-use plastic and styrofoam, the Thai island Ko Tao has gone one step further by encouraging people to turn old T-shirts into eco-shopping bags. Thailand is among the top five consumers of single-use plastic, and a few cuts and a bit of stitching on an unwanted T-shirt can will replace endless plastic bags.

**A Diver's Must-Have Bag.** Drybags come in an arrangement of sizes to accommodate different needs. Savvy liveaboard divers keep essential items, such as passports and credit cards, in a drybag and leave it for safe-keeping with the skipper in the wheelhouse. Should you have to abandon your boat, you don't want to be searching for these items in cabins below decks.

**Whale Shark Riders Get Their Comeuppance.** A recent video of divers riding a whale shark in West Papua's Cenderawasih Bay went viral on social media, sparking outrage among sensible scuba divers. Kaka Slank, an Indonesian punk rocker, posted the video on his Twitter page August 9 (<https://twitter.com/fishGOD/status/1027580052387459072>), and it immediately got the authorities' attention. Whale sharks are now protected by law in Indonesia, so the culprits have since been identified and arrested, although it is not clear what charges the divers will face.

## undercurrent

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

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