

My Most Favorite Location

Contributors' Picks from Around the World

Text and photos by John A. Ares, Larry Cohen, Lureen Ferretti, Anita George-Ares, Frankie Grant, Jennifer Idol, Kate Jonker, Celia Kujala, Matthew Meier, Brandi Mueller, Gary Rose, Michael Rothschild, Don Silcock, Olga Torrey, Ron Watkins and Claudia Weber-Gebert

When we asked our contributors what their most favorite dive location was, they came back with photos and stories of beautiful and exciting spots both near and far from home. From the tropical waters of Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the Philippines, Chuuk, Mexico's Revillagigedo Islands, Solomon Islands and Cayman Islands, to the subtropical waters off Baha California, Guadalupe Island and the Coronado Islands in Mexico and the eastern coast of Florida in the United States, to the temperate waters off South Africa, the US state of New Jersey, and British Columbia in Canada, to the frigid waters of Alaska, *X-Ray Mag* contributors share their favorite dive locations.

CLAUDIA
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CLAUDIA WEBER-GERBERT



LEFT TO RIGHT: Silversides and sweepers hover over lush soft corals on reef wall; Pygmy seahorse is well camouflaged in soft coral; Prehistoric rock paintings; Divers with whale shark with remoras attached; Wobbegong resting on reef; Liveaboard moored in Triton Bay. PREVIOUS PAGE: Vibrant coral reef and leather corals at Triton Bay in Raja Ampat of West Papua, Indonesia



Triton Bay, Raja Ampat, Indonesia

Text and photos by
Claudia Weber-Gebert

Raja Ampat is well known and beloved by many a diver. One hour's flight south from Sorong leads to Kaimana; this was where my journey to Triton Bay began. The diving area of Triton Bay, south of Raja Ampat, was explored in more detail only about four to five years ago. Only a handful of liveaboard boats go to these dive sites, and there is currently only one resort. Apart from a few local small fishing villages, there is no civilisation.

However, old traces of civilisation can be seen here in the form of over 10,000-year-old prehistoric wall paintings. The captain skilfully steered our vessel, the *Gaia Love*, right up to these places, so that the guests could take pictures of these special prehistoric works of art.

On the coast of West Papua, an upward current brings nutrient-rich water to the

surface. The resulting abundance of fish and biodiversity is indescribable. There are so many fish that you cannot see the reef. Enormously large and colourful soft corals make up the basis of these dive areas, starting at a depth of only five metres.

Beautiful hard corals can also be found in completely intact and densely populated reefs, which one can no longer find anywhere else. Fish hide under large table corals, barrel sponges stand like huge planters between the corals, and coral gardens support large areas of black corals. The sight is overwhelming. Although the water is slightly green, the visibility is fine. Underwater photographers will definitely get their money's worth, in both macro and wide-angle shots.

Where the currents pass the steep walls, one can see large, up to 3m-high coral sea fans in every colour and variety. On the sea fans, one can find the much sought-after photo subject: pygmy seahorses, at a depth of only 15m. Most of the time, these little seahorses can

only be found from 25 to 30m.

Schools of fish stream by like infinite ribbons through the water, including silversides, snappers,

fusiliers, buffalo (or hump-head) parrotfish, batfish and barracudas. Mantas and mobula rays also circle over cleaning stations. Of course, small macro subjects can also be found everywhere, such as lots of various colourful nudibranchs, crabs, ornate ghost pipefish, blue-ring octopuses and wunderpus octopuses.

Underwater life rages on, with silversides forming tight swarms, "flying" in formations and giving way to predators, in a skilful spectacle. The swarms are so densely packed that the light dims. The spectacle continues above the water's surface when predators such as dolphins and sailfish, which hunt for smaller prey fish, leap out of the water—these spectacles could even be seen from our vessel. In this case, one could certainly say that pictures really do speak louder than words! The fabulous underwater world here can hardly be described in mere words.

And then there is a very special highlight: whale sharks that come to a *bagan* fishing platform, where local fishermen breed small bait fish. The whale sharks had come here on their own. Nowadays, they are fed to an acceptable level, but only if there are liveaboards on site, i.e., one to two times a week. So, they stay in the vicinity and offer the fishermen an additional source of income, namely the permission from the village elder that the divers may dive under the *bagan* for a fee, with a high probability of encountering the whale sharks. Sometimes, there are up to five whale sharks at a time—from young animals to huge giants. To the extent that feeding is practised here,

it is still acceptable.

It is not only the underwater landscapes that inspire, but also the many small floating islands and rocks that reach just out of the water and are covered with lush vegetation. Birds bring seeds from the mainland to the limestone rocks, so abundant vegetation has emerged. Washed under by the water's edge, the rocks seem to float above the sea at low tide, just like the scene in the James Bond film, showing rocky isles in Thailand or Palau.

And of course, the coastal landscape of West Papua also has the same beautiful charms. In the trees, one can see colourful birds, frigatebirds and other water birds circling over the sea, and at night, moths come to the ship, attracted by the light. They are the prey of the bats that flutter around the vessel at night. Ospreys can also be seen in the distance, but they are shy and do not come closer.

I will never forget Triton Bay and its wonders above and below the ocean's surface. ■



Large female great white with pilot fish and small remora (above). Exposure: ISO 100, f/5.0, 1/60s. Gear: Canon 10D camera, Sigma 10-17 zoom lens, Ikelite housing, ambient light; Adult sea lions do taunt the sharks, being more agile (left). Exposure: ISO 100, f/5.0, 1/60s. Gear: Canon 10D camera, Sigma 10-17 zoom lens, Ikelite housing, ambient light; You can get close to the sharks, and they do take test bites on the bars (top right). Exposure: ISO 100, f/5.6, 1/60s. Gear: Canon 10D camera, Sigma 10-17 zoom lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS-161 strobes

Guadalupe Island, Mexico: Cage Diving with Great White Sharks

Text and photos by John A. Ares

Guadalupe Island is located off the coast of Baja, Mexico. Diving with the apex predators is a thrill and not scary when you do it inside a cage. I think about this trip almost every day. The dive operator's boat, the *Nautilus Explorer*, was built for the purpose of having four cages in the water at the same time for uncrowded viewing. The cages are about 15ft high and made of two-inch industrial-grade aluminum pipes with 18in openings for cameras.

Up to four divers are allowed in a cage, using surface-supplied air. Scuba tanks equipped with octopus regulators are available in the cages, if needed. Two cages are lowered to a depth of 40ft for 45 minutes per dive. After that, they are winched back up to the surface. Two additional cages remain just below the surface at the stern.

The reason the sharks are here has to do with the tasty sea lion pups that are here in abundance from June to August. Nature gives the pups a test first and they may not get the time to learn how to avoid the

sharks as the adults do. Even at the surface, the sea lions keep one eye in the water, scanning below them.

During the trip, we saw seven great white sharks over the course of three days, which were part of a group of around 150 "regulars" that researchers have identified. Scratches, scars and other identifying marks make identifications fairly easy. We saw up to three individuals on one dive. Visit: johnares.photoshelter.com



Great white female about to ram our cage from below. Our cage rose about three feet in the water column. Exposure: ISO 100, f/4.5, 1/60s. Gear: Canon 10D camera, Ikelite housing, Sigma 10-17 zoom lens, ambient light



Wolf eels mate for life and have monogamous relationships (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/4, 1/180s. Gear: Olympus E-620 camera, Olympus 7-14mm lens at 14mm, Olympus housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes; Giant Pacific octopuses are considered the most intelligent invertebrates (top right). Exposure: ISO 250, f/5.6, 1/125s. Gear: Olympus E-620 camera, Olympus 7-14mm lens at 14mm, Olympus housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes; Lingcod can weigh around 59kg (130 lb) (right). Exposure: ISO 400, f/8, 1/180s. Gear: Olympus E-620 camera, Olympus 7-14mm lens at 7mm, Olympus housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes

Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada

Text and photos by Larry Cohen

Many scuba divers enjoy going on warm-water trips, but one of my most favorite dive locations is the cold, nutrient-rich waters of British Columbia. The water might be green and cold, but this is an underwater photographer's paradise. I traveled across North America twice to experience the area's magnificent marine life.

The first trip was with John de Boeck's Browning Pass HideAway and the second trip was on the *Nautilus Swell* liveaboard. Both trips were spectacular. Diving double tanks, my dive buddy, Olga Torrey, and I stayed in

the water longer than the other divers. The *Swell's* captain commented that we did not move more than three meters during a one-and-a-half-hour dive. There was always so much to observe and photograph, we did not have to stray far from our entry point.

Wolf eels have always been on my bucket list. They might have a face that only a mother could love, but these gentle fish have a wonderful personality. We spent hours feeding them sea urchins. Seeing a relatively small giant Pacific octopus out in the open during the day was a real treat.

At the end of our trip on the *Nautilus Swell*, the captain said we could do one last

dive in Port Hardy. He told us that it would be a dark dive, and the visibility would be limited. He said we should see some big lingcod. Jumping in the water, we realized the captain was correct.

Even during the day, it was so dark it felt like a spooky night dive. As we explored the area, we saw a lingcod so huge, it scared us! When the captain said big, we did not know he meant gigantic! This was the perfect ending to another great dive trip to British Columbia.

We cannot wait until we could go back to explore the rich underwater environment of western Canada. Visit: liquidimagesuw.com





Diverse species are at Blue Heron Bridge in Riviera Beach in Florida, USA. CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Seahorses mating; Striped bumblebee shrimp; Arrow crabs molting; Octopus mother with brood of eggs; Pair of seahorses in mating ritual; Crab devouring another crab—hopefully, not a relative; It takes a village—two male frogfish lift a female frogfish to spawn.



Blue Heron Bridge, Riviera Beach, Florida, USA

Text and photos by Lureen Ferretti

Considering the number of favorite dives sites I have, determining an ultimate favorite was difficult. So, I based my decision on the number of great photos and memorable experiences I have had at a single site. This would place the world-renowned Blue Heron Bridge in Riviera Beach, Florida, at the top of my list.

If you are unfamiliar with the type of diving at the site, it is referred to as muck diving. There is a shallow, sandy bottom, with little to no natural coral, gorgonians or marine vegetation. It is located in the Intracoastal, a body of water that lies between the mainland of southeastern Florida and a thin barrier island to the east of the mainland. The

ocean water is refreshed with each high tide, which brings with it a multitude of cryptic critters from the Gulf Stream current. The best time to dive is generally an hour before high tide to an hour after high tide, but with good air consumption and knowledge of the terrain, you can extend your dive time.

Why is it my favorite? It is just a 45-minute drive from my home, and the price is right—just the cost of an air fill, allowing me to dive there frequently. At Blue Heron Bridge, I have learned so much about marine life behavior, camera settings, strobe positioning, proper dive etiquette and good buoyancy skills... this dive site is a treasure.

Having dived here so often, I learned about the life cycles of many marine species and witnessed incredible

behaviors. For example, striped bumblebee shrimp are most often seen when the water temperature is a bit “colder” during the winter months, and are most often found on purple short spine pin-cushion sea urchins.

Seahorses have a glorious mating ritual. They hold tails and swim together, and they move in a way that appears as if they are singing, but I suspect this is a process in which they hydrate themselves before mating, and the male bends over repeatedly to open his brood pouch before the mating pair lift off into the water column. Having witnessed their ritual on three separate occasions, I know what is going to happen when I see that behavior and so the waiting game begins. I dive as often as possible and watch from a distance

so that I do not disrupt them, and if I am lucky, I will capture the moment the female deposits her eggs into her mate’s pouch (yes, it is the male that carries the babies).

I have also seen frogfish spawning several times, lancer dragonets spawning, predation (crabs are brutal), a multitude of cleaning stations, arrowhead crabs molting, and over the course of a couple of months, I tracked the progress of a new mother octopus from the day she first laid her eggs, after which she looked drained and unaware, to the day the eggs hatched.

These are only some of the amazing experiences I have had, diving at my local watering hole, but there have been many, many more. Visit: DeepWaterPics.com



ANITA GEORGE-ARES



ANITA GEORGE-ARES

Two warty frogfish with a black Randall's frogfish (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/200s. Gear: Canon EOS Digital Rebel XTi camera, EF 50mm f/2.5 compact macro lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes; Many-toothed garden eel in seagrass bed (left). Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/200s. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, EF-S60mm f/2.8 macro USM lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes



ANITA GEORGE-ARES

Thorny seahorses clinging to a sponge (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 1/160s. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, EF-S60mm f/2.8 macro USM lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes; Adult striped catfish hiding under a coral overhang (left). Exposure: ISO 100, f/11, 1/200s. Gear: Canon EOS Rebel SL1 camera, EF-S60mm f/2.8 macro USM lens, Ikelite housing, two Ikelite DS161 strobes

Dumaguete, Philippines

Text and photos by Anita George-Ares

The Dauin coast, a diving mecca often referred to as Dumaguete, is located on Negros Island in the Philippines. My husband, John, and I made five dive trips to Dumaguete. We are looking forward to diving there again. On every trip to Dumaguete, we see marine species that we have never seen before. Dumaguete's wonderful marine biodiversity is due to its diverse habitats.

Although Dumaguete is known for its muck diving, it is more than a muck-div-

ing destination. Scattered coral heads and sloping reefs provide great photographic opportunities. At different dive sites, there are different species depending on the bottom characteristics (coarse sand, silt, coral rubble or sea grass). In addition to photographing the numerous fish and invertebrate species, it is not unusual to see a green sea turtle or a turtle-headed sea snake. For those who love octopuses, I have photographed six different octopus species here, in addi-

tion to one octopus species that I have not yet identified. The many-toothed garden eel shown in the photo is one of three garden eel species I have photographed at Dumaguete. Two of the four frogfish species I photographed here are also shown.

Dumaguete's dive sites are located within ten marine protected areas. There are a few, small artificial reefs

made of tires or wooden boats. These artificial reefs have a good diversity of photo-worthy marine creatures. For those wanting to explore other dive sites, day trips are available to Apo and Siquijor Islands and to Oslob's whale sharks.

Please visit my Facebook page at: facebook.com/profile.php?id=100016947967639



Location



Gear used for all images: Canon 7d Mark II camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Sea&Sea housing, dual YS-D2 strobes. Underwater scene at Land's End, Baja California Sur, Mexico (above). Exposure: ISO 100, f/8, 1/125s, ambient light only; Sea lion exhaling bubbles (right). Exposure: ISO 200, f/7.1, 1/250s; Huge bait ball (top right). Exposure: ISO 200, f/7.1, 1/250s

Land's End, Baja California Sur, Mexico

Text and photos by Frankie Grant

Positioned as the last dive site on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico, Land's End hosts an ever-changing variety of creatures big and small. As prevailing currents change with the seasons, divers have chance encounters with whales, schooling mantas, bait balls, whale sharks, and more. If this is not enough, Land's End also boasts an active sea lion colony and a small shipwreck! This is a place so special and unique, every single dive will present new excitement.

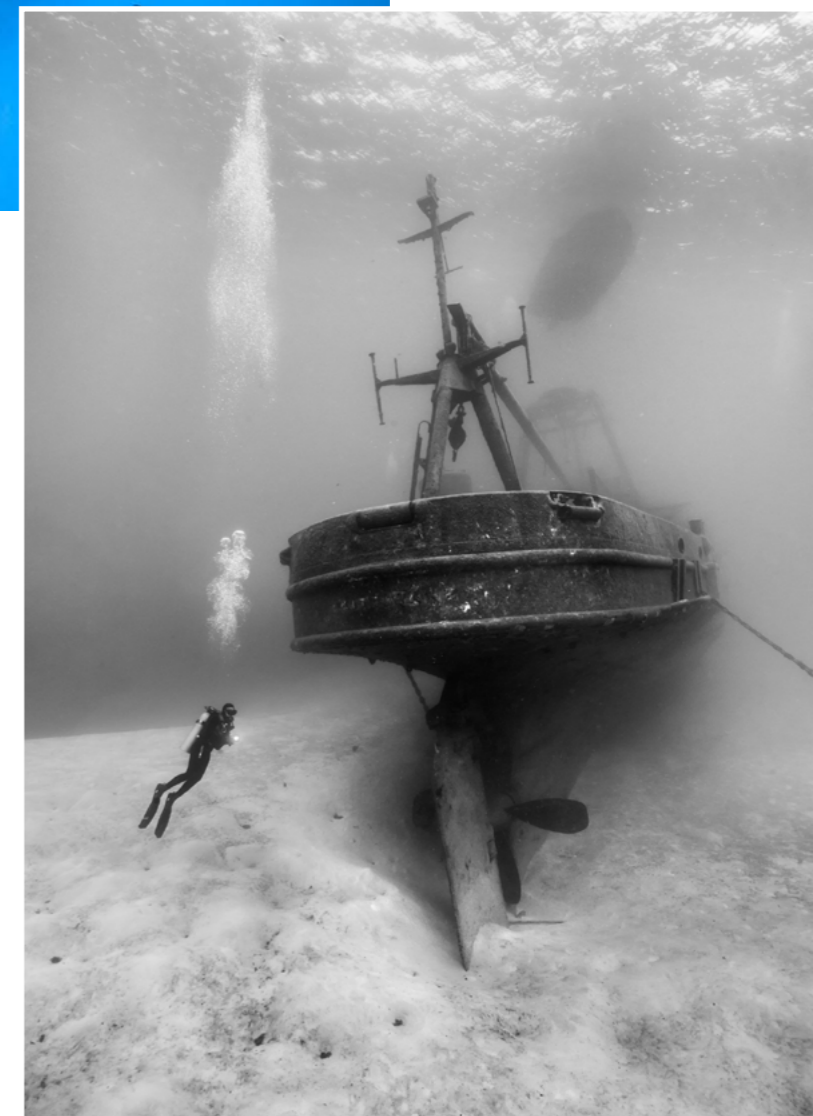
During the change from summer to fall, schooling fish looking for protection swarm the rocks around Land's

End, leading to countless sea lions hunting together in this area. I have spent many dives simply content enough to sit on the sand and watch these sea lions bob and weave through the bait ball. Still, the most memorable experience would have to be witnessing a "heat run" of humpback whales zoom by the pinnacle as my clients and I looked on with amazement of the sheer size of these animals.

This site should be at the top of any ocean enthusiast's bucket list for its ease of access, unique animal encounters as well as the other animal encounters one can link together into one amazing vacation. Look no further than Cabo San Lucas and Land's End! Visit: frankiegrant.com

Gear used for all images: Nikon D610 camera, Nikkor 14-24mm lens, Nauticam housing

A panoramic view of the USS *Kittiwake* shows the ship's layout. Exposure: ISO 640, 14mm, f/11, 1/60s



Before the hurricane, the USS *Kittiwake* sat upright, with an exposed propellor. Exposure: ISO 400, 18mm, f/11, 1/100s

Groupers can be seen looking for wrasse on the reefs to help clean their mouths (right). Exposure: ISO 400, 24mm, f/9.0, 1/200s

Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands

Text and photos by Jennifer Idol

Although the "next dive" is always "my favorite," few destinations stand out as remarkable experiences. Of my dives, those at Grand Cayman have had the greatest influence over my photography. Cathy Church's Photo Centre is a pillar of photography, which has attracted world-class photographers for decades, including Cathy herself and the photographers I had the joy of diving with during a once-in-a-lifetime photo workshop.

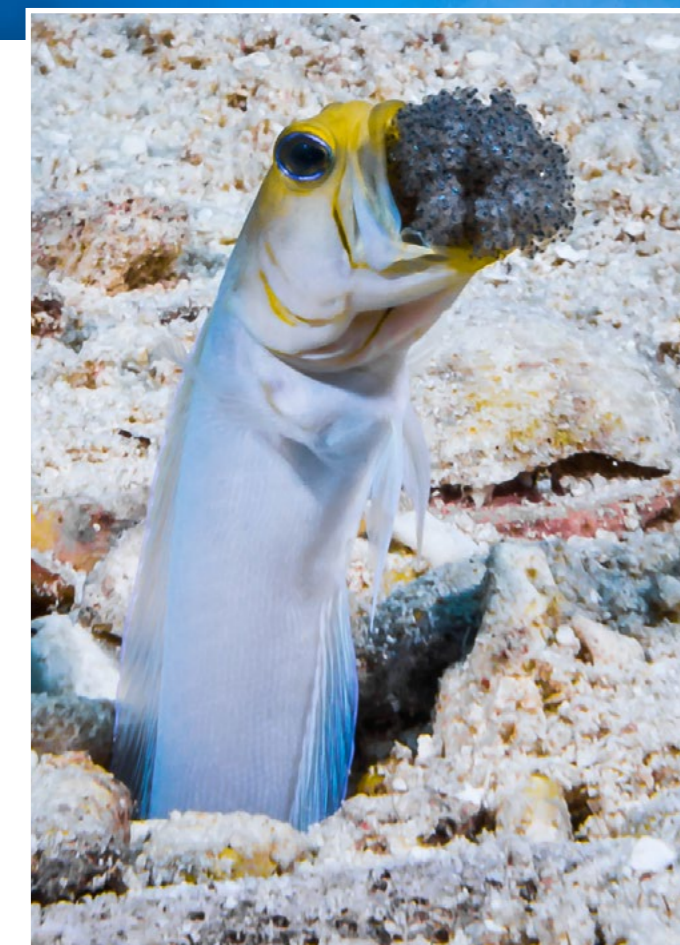
While my experiences with Grand Cayman are personal, the opportunities for anyone to experience the delights offered here are plentiful. From the still remarkable USS *Kittiwake* to Devil's Grotto and stingrays, subjects abound. A hurricane transformed the USS *Kittiwake* in 2011 but also added the nearby reef as a subject by proximity.

The people we dive with enrich our dives beyond the environment we immerse ourselves into, which is why this often-photographed region has left such an indelible impression on me. Diving is easy with good visibility and limited current, so all attention can be given to buddies and photography.

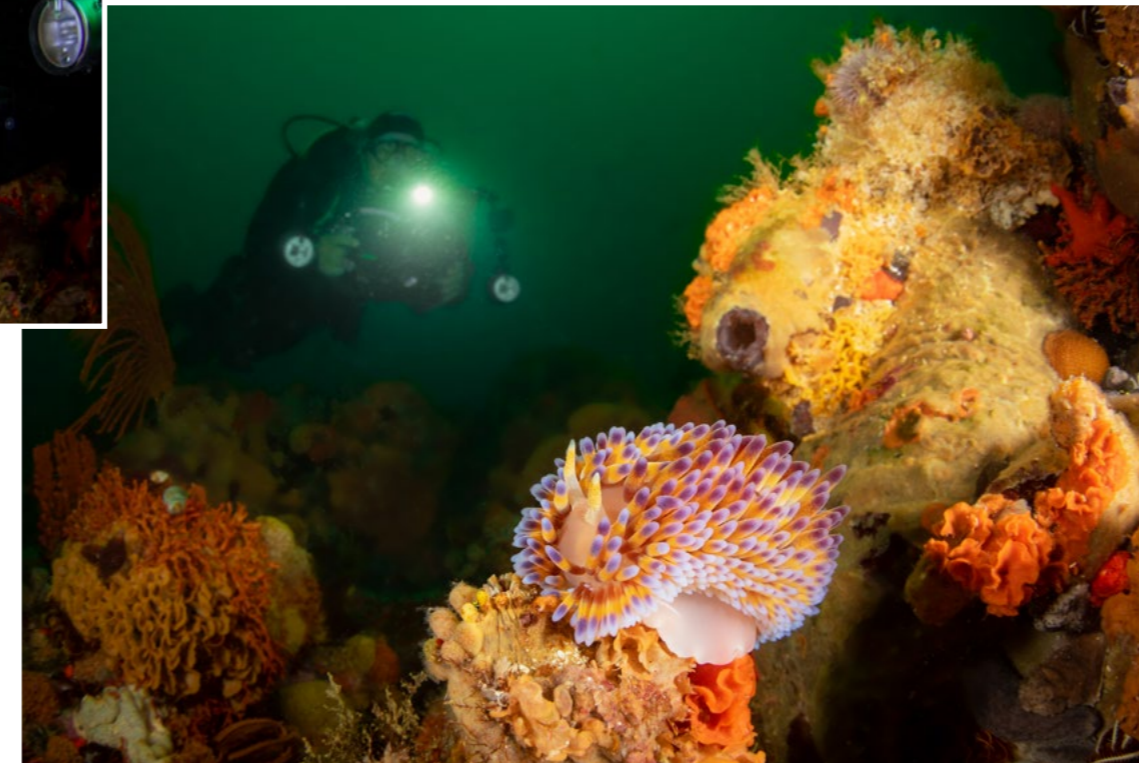
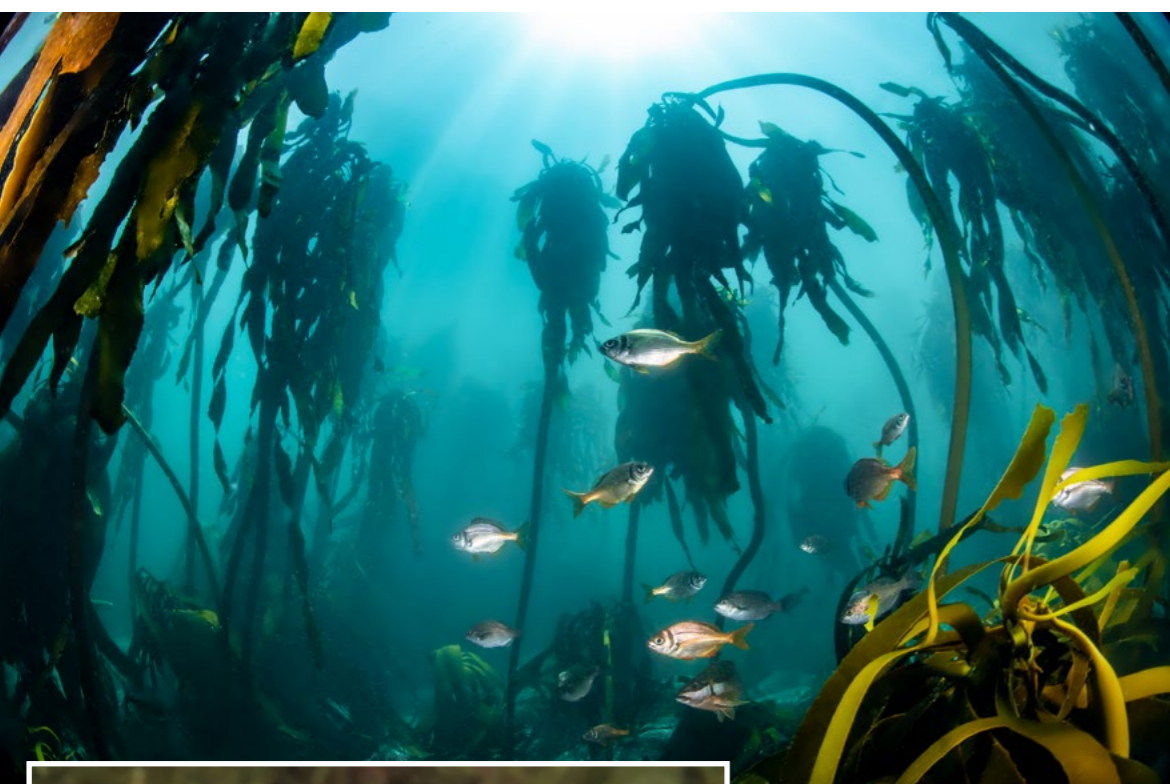


Macro life abounds in shallow reefs, particularly from the Sunset House area. From secretary blennies to yellowhead jawfish and garden eels, unique animal behavior can be observed with ease.

Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic changed the world, more wildlife has returned to Grand Cayman, making this a highly desirable destination. Shore diving is widely available, and more accessible than boats, until tourism returns to full capacity. Visit: uwDesigner.com



A male yellowhead jawfish aerates eggs. Exposure: ISO 400, 24mm, f/9, 1/200



Beautiful False Bay coastline, where the mountains reach the sea (above). Photo taken with a Samsung S10 smartphone; Gasflame nudibranch at Whittle Rock dive site in Simon's Town, western side of False Bay (left). Exposure: ISO 320, f/14, 1/40s; The pristine and plunging reefs of Steenbras Deep, Gordon's Bay, on the eastern side of False Bay (below). Exposure: ISO 320, f/16, 1/80s; Leopard catshark at Drop Zone dive site in Gordon's Bay, eastern side of False Bay (top left column). Exposure: ISO 320, f/14, 1/30s; The great African kelp forest at Blousteen, eastern side of False Bay (middle left column). Exposure: ISO 160, f/13, 1/200s; Portrait of a resting pyjama shark (bottom left column). Exposure: ISO 160, f/25, 1/250s. Gear used for all underwater images: Nikon D850 camera, Nikkor 8-15mm fisheye lens, Isotta housing, two Inon Z240 strobes, Orcatorch D900V for focus light

False Bay, Cape Town, South Africa

Text and photos by Kate Jonker

They say that home is where the heart is. My home is False Bay, with

There are shallow reefs that slope gently into the Bay, glittering kelp forests that line the coast, pristine deeper reefs, and wrecks. Whales roam False Bay throughout the year. Resident Bryde's whales follow the bait fish, and in October and November, Southern right whales make False Bay their safe refuge. Dolphins, often in their hundreds, can be seen chasing the larger schools of sardines and this, in turn, attracts the orcas.

False Bay is a playground for Cape fur seals that laze on the surface, often swooping down and barking playfully at unsuspecting divers. Small reef fish such as blennies, triplefin and klipfish perch on the marine-lush pinnacles, whilst dozens of jewel-like nudibranchs graze their way across dense pastures of soft corals, sponges, bryozoans and hydroids. Beautiful basket stars, clinging to the many sea fans, wave their outstretched arms to-and-fro in the gentle surge, grasping at tiny particles of food in the water column.

Small sharks such as puffadder and dark shysharks loll lazily on bouncy yellow sponges, and the larger pyjama and leopard catsharks patrol the reefs in search of a snack. Inquisitive short-tail stingrays, gully sharks and sevengill cow sharks can also be encountered in the kelp forests.

False Bay has it all! No matter where I travel, it is the kelp forests and reefs of False Bay that call me back; this is my home, and where my heart belongs. Visit: katejonker.com

its swaying great African kelp forests and pristine reefs filled with vibrant and fascinating marine life. It is here, in False Bay, that the Oscar-winning, heart-warming, heart-wrenching tale of a man's friendship with an octopus took place. It is magical here.

False Bay is situated on the southwestern tip of Africa, where the sprawling metropolis of southern Cape Town and the lush vineyards of the Cape meet the ocean. The beauty above the water is reflected beneath the waves, where the mountains dip their toes into the sea and give way to underwater wonderlands.





Sea lion pup (top left). Exposure: ISO 400, f/11, 1/250s; Sunburst (above). Exposure: ISO 250, f/11, 1/250s; Sea lion playtime (right). Exposure: ISO 250, f/11, 1/250s; Seaweed toy (left). Exposure: ISO 400, f/11, 1/250s. Gear used for all images: Nikon D500 camera, Tokina 10-17mm fisheye lens, Nauticam NA-D500 housing, dual Sea&Sea YS-D3 strobes

Coronado Islands, Baja California, Mexico

Text and photos by Celia Kujala

Diving with sea lions is one of the most fun and magical experiences a diver can have underwater. One of my favorite places to dive with them is the Coronado Islands, a small group of islands off the northwestern coast of Baja California, Mexico, accessible by a day trip from San Diego, California.

The best dive site for interactions is Lobster Shack on the North Island where the California sea lion rookery is located. It was there that I first went diving after I bought an underwater housing for my DSLR camera. It is a location that keeps drawing me back.

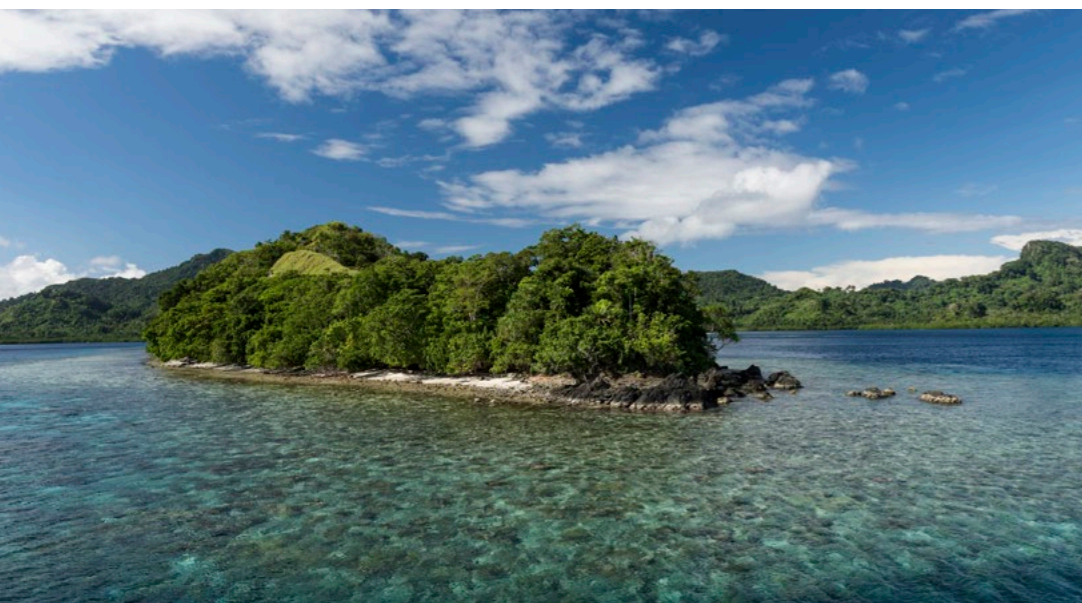
California sea lions give birth to their pups in early summer. As summer comes to an end, the pups have matured enough and start venturing farther away from the shore. Each day, they gain more and more confidence, exploring their underwater world.

They are extremely adorable and curious. Play is a very important part of their development and every-



thing in the ocean is a potential toy. They enjoy playing with each other, seaweed, rocks, starfish, sticks, feathers and even divers!

Observing the individuals in this rookery has taught me so much about sea lions and underwater photography. I am forever grateful for each moment. When the time comes for me to leave their underwater paradise, I start dreaming of the next time I can slip back into their world. Visit: sealpeace.com



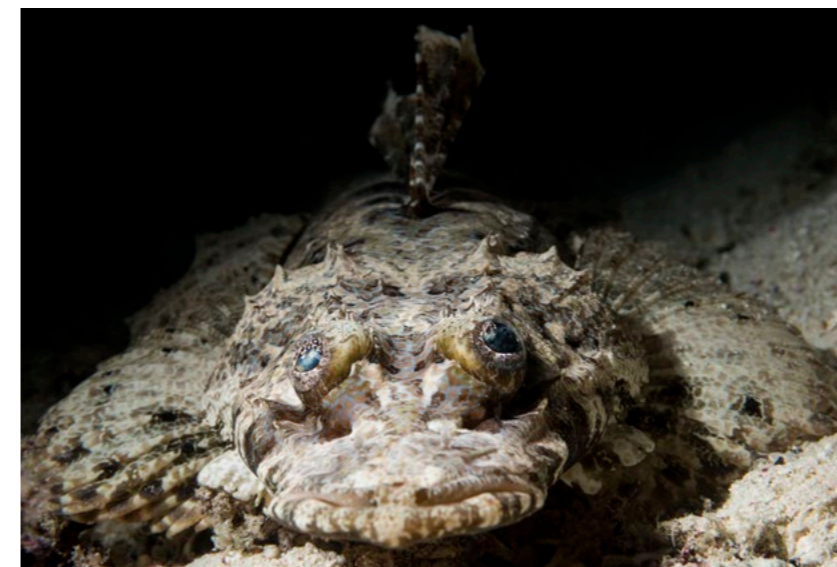
Solomon Islands

Text and photos by Matthew Meier

I cannot honestly say that I have only one single favorite dive destination, as I have been fortunate to experience dozens of incredible dive adventures around the globe. However, my most recent addition to the “I-cannot-wait-to-get-back-there” list is the Solomon Islands. This remote chain of tropical islands off the eastern edge of Papua New Guinea offers seemingly exclusive access to pristine, rarely visited coral reef systems, magnificent and massive sea fans and plate corals, spectacular underwater caverns, abundant sea life and a wide assortment of World War II wrecks, both above and below the surface.

Numerous land-based dive operations, with an array of accommodation options, exist on several islands, plus two liveaboard dive boats offer varying itineraries to transport divers to the otherwise inaccessible corners of the Solomon's over 900 islands.

My fascination with WWII history in the Pacific



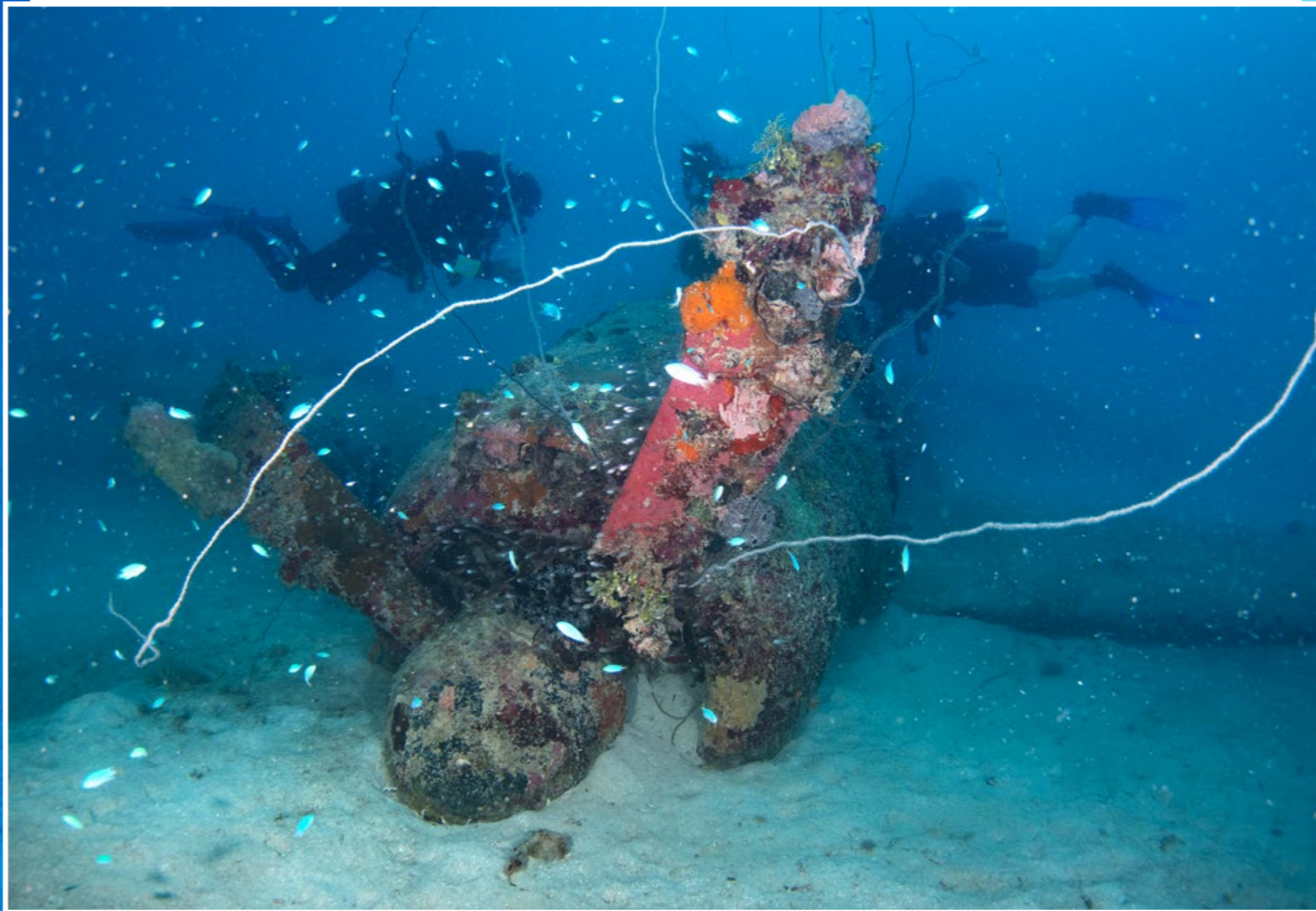
added special meaning to touching down on the capital island of Guadalcanal and to observing where John F. Kennedy was stationed before being shipwrecked in his PT-109. I was also privileged to dive on a newly discovered Corsair fighter plane near the town of Munda, which was nearly fully intact 75 years after crashing into the sea.

Bring your sense of adventure, as things are still a bit rustic, but the locals are lovely and inviting, the diving is phenomenal, and the scenery is out of this world. Save space in your luggage for some of the planet's best woodcarvings and do not miss the fresh squeezed bush-lime juice. You can thank me later. Visit: MatthewMeierPhoto.com

A shallow coral reef encircles this small island just offshore of the main island of Tulagi, Tulagi Switzer Island, Florida Islands (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 1/250s. Gear: Nikon D810 camera, Nikon 24-70mm lens; An F4U Corsair fighter plane, resting upright on the sandy sea floor, nearly fully intact except for its propeller, at Munda (top left). Exposure: ISO 1600, f/6.3, 1/60s. Gear: Nikon D810 camera, Nikon 17-35mm lens, Subal housing; Head-on view of a crocodile flathead fish laying on the sandy bottom, Marovo Lagoon (center). Exposure: ISO 200, f/20, 1/200s. Gear: Nikon D810 camera, Nikon 105mm macro lens, Subal housing, Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes with snoots

A scuba diver hovering behind a massive red sea fan on a wall, Russell Islands (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/30s. Gear: Nikon D810 camera, Sigma 15mm fisheye lens, Subal housing, Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes; An aggregation of reef fish swimming above hard and soft corals in a shallow coral garden, Marovo Lagoon (top right). Exposure: ISO 200, f/5.6, 1/80s. Gear: Nikon D810 camera, Sigma 15mm fisheye lens, Subal housing, Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes





Location

Shotan Maru stern (top left). Exposure: ISO 500, f/5.6, 1/100s. Gear: Nikon D850 camera, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite DS161 strobes; Jill airplane (above). Exposure: ISO 400, f/8, 1/125s. Gear: Nikon D850 camera, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite DS161 strobes; Colorful marine life decorating the wrecks (right). Exposure: ISO 320, f/11, 1/100s. Gear: Nikon D850 camera, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite DS161 strobes; Fujikawa Maru from the surface (bottom right). Exposure: ISO 500, f/5.6, 1/200s. Gear: Nikon D850 camera



Artifacts, bowls and a record, which was most likely propaganda. Exposure: ISO 250, f/10, 1/100s. Gear: Nikon D850 camera, Ikelite housing, dual Ikelite DS161 strobes

Truk Lagoon, Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

Text and photos by Brandi Mueller

I love diving no matter where I am, but I really love wreck diving because of the history involved. I find nothing more exciting than to be able to literally dive into history and see a ship or plane, knowing the stories of how it got there. Truk Lagoon, now known as Chuuk Lagoon, is one of the world's most famous wreck diving locations, where more than 50 vessels were sunk in one battle during WWII.

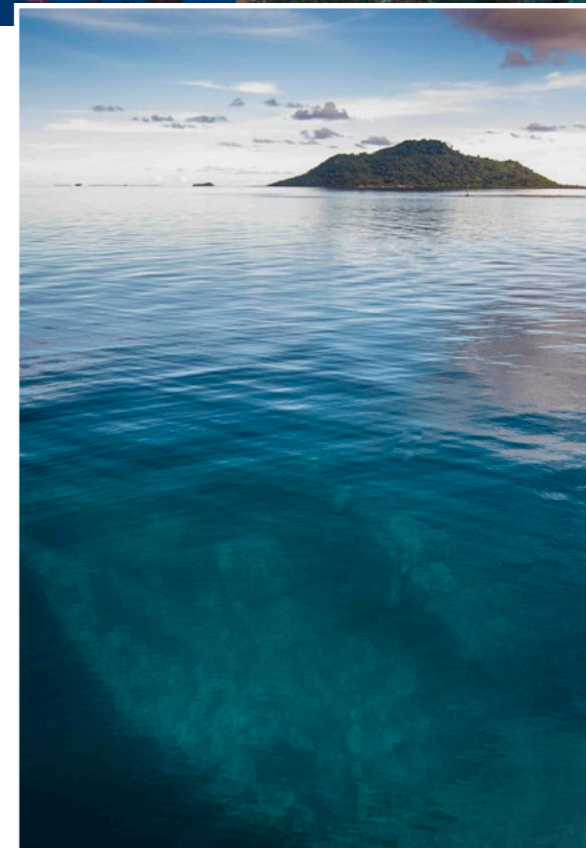
The Americans launched Operation Hailstone on 17 and 18 February 1944, and blindsided the important Japanese base, leaving an entire

museum underwater for divers to explore. Even better, the tropical waters of Micronesia in the Pacific Ocean have turned the wrecks into living memorials with colorful soft coral draped like wreaths and fish life swarming the ships.

The types of wrecks here include luxury cruise liners requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Navy, merchant ships, two destroyers, a submarine, airplanes, a tugboat and more, with the largest over 500ft long. The Federated States of Micronesia made salvaging the wrecks illegal early on, preventing looters from taking home artifacts, which means many items are still intact and inside the ships for

divers to see. Elegant china, rubber soles of shoes, gas masks, beer and sake bottles, sinks and toilets are just some of what can be seen. There are also Long Lance torpedoes, massive shells, landmines, and literally piles of bullets, among other ammunitions.

Divers can still penetrate the ships to view engine rooms, galleys, bathrooms and crew quarters. Amid the history behind the wrecks, the artifacts you can see, and the lovely marine life that has made the wrecks their home, there is something for everyone at Truk Lagoon. Please visit: brandiunderwater.com





Giant black manta, San Benedicto (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 13mm, 1/125s; Socorro Island (left). Exposure: ISO 200, f/16, 12mm, 1/125s; Giant chevron manta (right), San Benedicto. Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 17mm, 1/100s; Whitetip sharks in "cavelet," Roca Partida (top right). Exposure: ISO 200, f/11, 17mm, 1/125s. All photos were taken with a Nikon D500 camera, Tokina 10-17 lens, Nauticam housing, Inon Z330 strobes



Diver with whitetip shark, Roca Partida. Exposure: ISO 200, f/8, 12mm, 1/100s

Revillagigedo Archipelago, Mexico

Text and photos by Gary Rose, MD

Pinnacles reaching up from the benthic Pacific floor a mile below, lava flows extending like rivers into the deep azure of the sea—and without human presence—synergistically create one of the most remote and beautiful dive locations on Planet Earth. The islands of the Revillagigedo Archipelago are located 300 miles from Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Deep azure water, strong nutritive currents, and open ocean collaborate to create the perfect environment for grey whales, whale sharks, giant

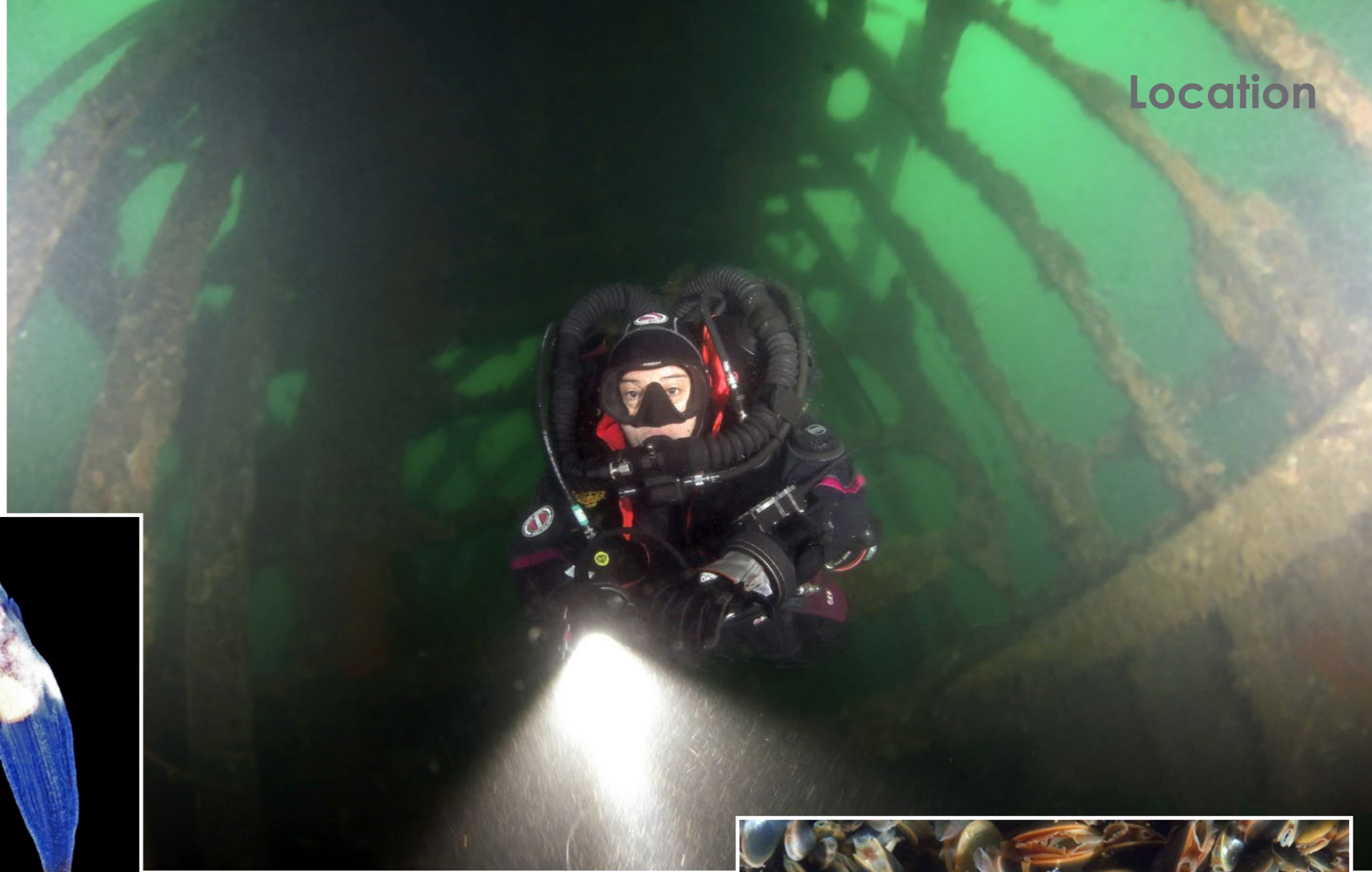
mantas, hammerhead sharks, whitetip sharks, Galapagos sharks, porpoises and seals.

At Socorro Island, giant mantas, with wingspans of up to 21ft, regularly swim up to patiently waiting divers. They dance, swirl, loop, pirouette and plunge to the rhythm of the sea. When they come up close, their cognitive eyes penetrate one's thoughts, and you become as one.

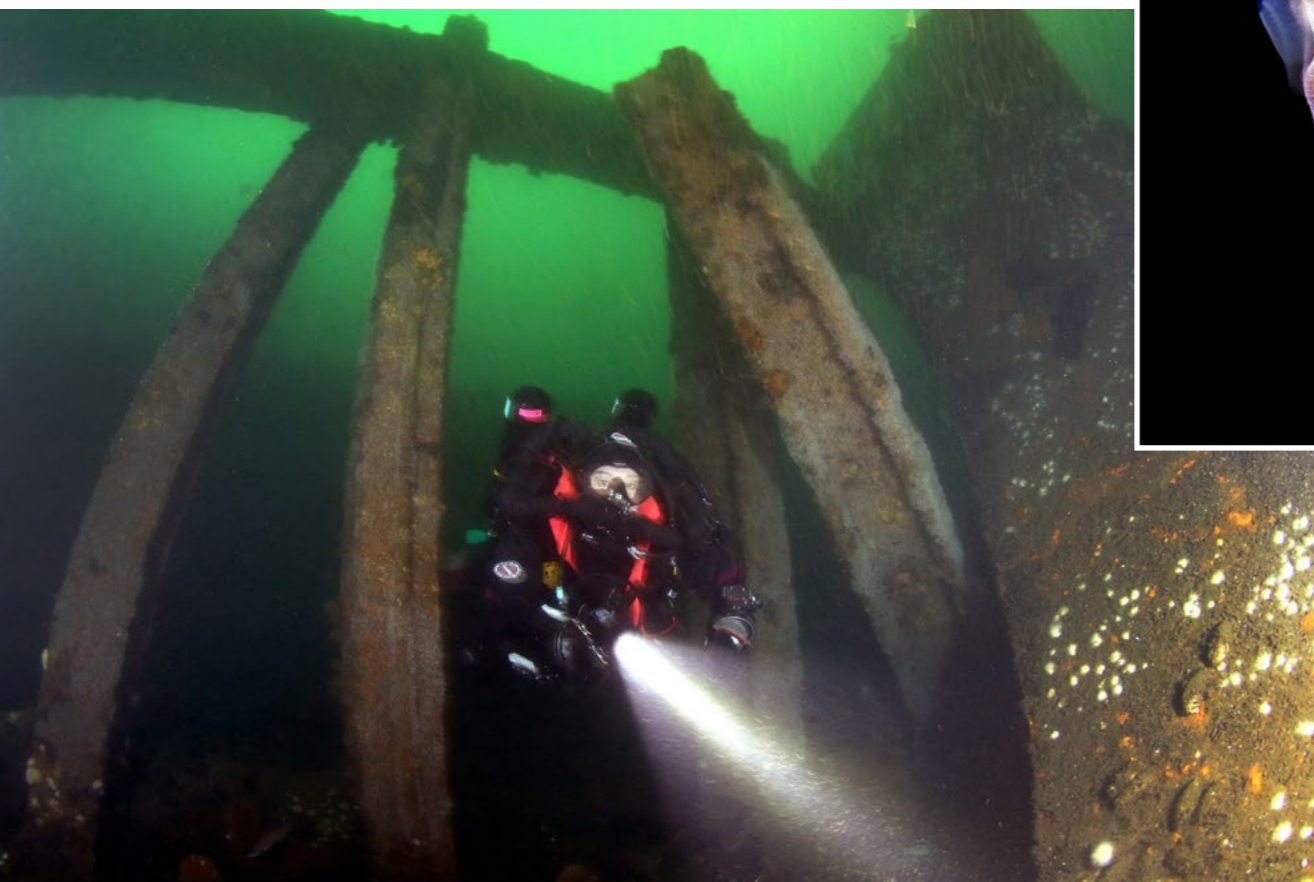
Roca Partida Island is 300ft long and plunges vertically to the ocean floor, miles below. It is a prolific aquarium of pelagic diversity. Unique to Roca are the shallow "cavelets" that pockmark this vertical and sheer drop-off, each containing uniquely packed whitetip sharks within, which

live symbiotically with lobsters and moray eels. If you approach very slowly, from below, you will be able to photographically capture this amazing natural phenomenon.

One can only get to Revillagigedo by liveaboard. I traveled with Nautilus Liveaboards on the *Undersea*. In addition to the amazing comfort, scrumptious dining around the clock, four dives per day with a fabulous crew, it was a photographer's dream, complete with individual work and charging stations. Revillagigedo is my favorite dive site, and I am already planning my next photographic dream trip. Visit: garyrosephotos.com



Dive buddy on the *Great Isaac* wreck. Exposure: ISO 400, f/11, 1/8s. Gear: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Nauticam housing, Tokina 10-17 fisheye (10 mm) lens, dual Inon Z-330 strobes



New Jersey Shore, USA

Text and photos by
Michael Rothschild, MD

I have been to Truk Lagoon, Bonaire, and a number of other exotic dive locations, but my favorite dive location is just an hour's drive from my home in New York City—the New Jersey Shore. One of the reasons why I love the dives here is that I can go every weekend. There is no need for time off from work, air travel or hotels, and no camera and dive-gear luggage problems. But it is not just that. There is world-class cold-water diving here, much of it accessible to recreational divers.

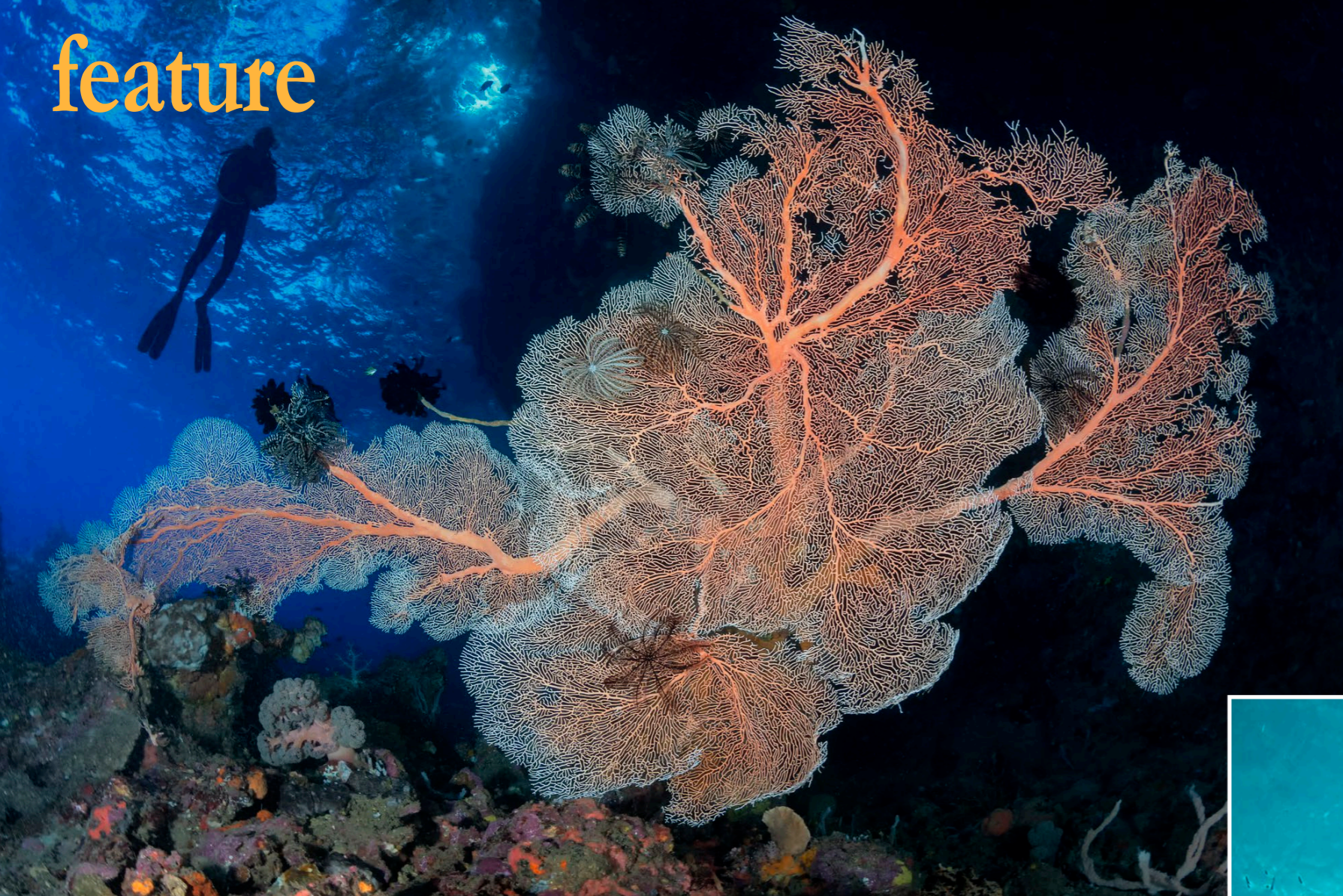
Folks here live on the edge of a vibrant marine ecosystem. I have seen a spectacular range of sea life, from tiny, beautiful nudibranchs to a hump-back whale, which swam past me last season while I was on the deco line.

In addition to critters, the seafloor off the coast has hundreds of diveable shipwrecks. This is because New York has been a major shipping hub for 500 years, and because the relatively shallow continental shelf extends far out to sea, into the New York Bight. While some wreck dives at dive destinations are artificial reefs, most of those off

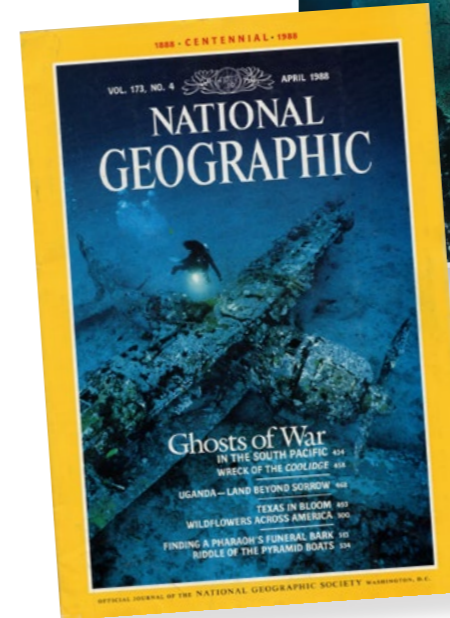
the New Jersey Shore are “real” wrecks, each with a fascinating and often tragic history. For example, during WWII, U-boats prowled these shores, sending scores of ships to the bottom. You can dive these historic sites today, as well as several of the submarines that sank them. Visit: seagypsies.nyc/imaging/

Dive buddy on the *Pinta* wreck (above). Exposure: ISO 1000, f/11, 1/6s. Gear: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Nauticam housing, Tokina 10-17 fisheye (10 mm) lens, dual Inon Z-330 strobes; Dive buddy on the *Stolt Dagali* wreck (top left). Exposure: ISO 500, f/10, 1/100s. Gear: Canon EOS 7D camera, Tokina 10-17 fisheye (13 mm) lens, Nauticam housing, dual Inon Z-330 strobes; Sea angel (center). Exposure: ISO 200, f/10, 1/160s. Gear: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Nauticam housing, Tamron 60mm macro, dual Inon Z-330 strobes; Mollusks on a shore dive in the Shark River Inlet, Belmar, New Jersey (right). Exposure: ISO 4000, f/14, 1/100s. Gear: Canon EOS 7D Mark II camera, Nauticam housing, Tamron 60mm macro, dual Inon Z-330 strobes





Diver with huge sea fan (above). Exposure: ISO 200, f/16, 1/100s. Gear: Nikon D300 camera, Tokina 10-17mm lens, Subal housing, dual Ikelite DS160 strobes; Sea fan on reef, with outrigger canoe in silhouette in the background (right). Exposure: ISO 320, f/8, 1/250s. Gear: Nikon D500 camera, Nikon 8-15mm lens, Nauticam housing, dual Ikelite DS160 strobes



The author was inspired to visit Deacon's Reef by David Doubilet's photos (above and right) in his article on Papua New Guinea in the April 1988 issue of *National Geographic* with a cover shot by Doubilet of an aircraft wreck in Papua New Guinea, shown at left.



Deacon's Reef, Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea

Text and photos by Don Silcock

My all-time personal favourite dive location is Deacon's Reef on the northern coast of Milne Bay. Why? Well, because it was the inspiration for my long-term fascination with Papua New Guinea.

I lived and worked in a total of four countries in the Middle East from 1977 to 1991. The last seven of those were in Bahrain, in the Persian Gulf, where I became a BSAC instructor. Every month, an issue of *National Geographic* (remember them?...) would arrive in my mailbox, and I was always inspired by the stories and images from remote and exotic locations.

Then in April 1988, there was an underwater image on the front cover, of an aircraft wreck in

Papua New Guinea taken by David Doubilet, and inside was his story of diving there, including a wonderful image from Deacon's Reef.

It took another ten years before I finally made it there; the logistical challenge of emigrating to Australia with my young family had to be addressed first. I eventually found the spot Doubilet had taken his image, but sadly missing was a model and any underwater photographic capability on my part.

Over the years since, I have dived Deacon's Reef many times. About five years ago, I was able to capture a couple of images that I felt came close to those taken by Doubilet over 30 years ago. Underwater photography is very much a journey, and inspiration is a must to embark on it. Visit:

Deacon's Reef





Location

Goniobranchus leopardus nudibranch, on Tufi's house reef (above). Exposure: ISO 250, f/22, 1/80s. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Olympus 60mm macro lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes; Diver at Mulloway Reef (left). Exposure: ISO 320, f/11, 1/80s. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Panasonic fisheye 8mm lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes



Freediver with outrigger canoe at Tufi. Exposure: ISO 250, f/8, 1/160s. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Panasonic 7-14mm lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea&Sea strobes

Tufi, Papua New Guinea

Text and photos by Olga Torrey

Recently, I took a trip to Papua New Guinea; it was my first time visiting the country, which I had dreamed about since my childhood. Tufi Resort was one of the highlights. As the plane landed on the dirt runway, I looked out the window and saw a grass hut with a banner that read: "Tufi International." I knew there was no Starbucks here, but an incredible adventure was about to begin.

Tufi Resort had fast dive boats, so most dive sites were about an hour away from the dock. Once one arrived, the reefs were spectacular!

Powerful currents and nutrient-rich water brought in many pelagic fish, including tuna, barracuda, hammer-head sharks, reef sharks, eagle rays and grouper. The clear water, giant coral heads and sponges impressed me. Mulloway and the other reefs were stunning. Tufi was a true paradise for underwater photographers.

In contrast to the spectacular reefs, the Tufi dock underwater looked like a junkyard. I wondered if I would find any living creatures there. To my surprise, I saw an astonishing variety of anemonefish, gobies, nudibranchs, shrimp, scorpionfish and banded pipefish. The dock at Tufi Resort became my favorite macro photography site.

During the stay, our group of divers was invited on a cultural tour of Baga Village. Members of the local tribe brought us to their village on outrigger canoes. We were greeted with villagers dancing in festive attire. Members of the local tribe demonstrated aspects of their traditional lifestyle, including how they made fishing lines, baskets for fruits and vegetables, necklaces of seashells, traditional cuisine, fire for cooking, clothing painted with traditional ornamentation, thatched roofs and even tattoos.

The stay at Tufi was a great experience. I cannot wait for the opportunity to return. It is a place that offers so much to see below and above the water's surface. Visit: fitimage.nyc



Member of the local tribe at Baga Village demonstrates the construction of fishing lines. Exposure: ISO 250, f/8, 1/250s. Gear: Olympus OM-D E-M5 camera, Olympus 12mm-50mm lens, Olympus FL-36 electronic flash





Location

Gear used for underwater images: Nikon D800 camera, 16-35mm lens, Sea&Sea housing, dual Sea&Sea YS-250 strobes. Jellyfish (above). Exposure: ISO 400, f/13, 1/200s



Ravencroft Lodge, Prince William Sound, Alaska, USA

Text and photos by Ron Watkins

An adventure in the wild, both above and below the water, is why I travel over 3,300 miles to dive in frigid 50°F water. The elusive salmon sharks that frequent the area in pursuit of spawning salmon are what first drew me to the location, but after my first trip, I realized that the area has so much more to offer. Massive blooms of moon jellyfish, so thick they block out the sunlight, are another highlight, as well as photographing the salmon run in shallow nearby streams.

Dive sites include a variety of sloping underwater rock formations, pinnacles and kelp forests, which host an abundance of marine life. Dive sites are chosen based on water conditions, tides and currents,

but my favorites are Manomi's Rocks, Luke's Wall and the area right off the Ravencroft Lodge. You can plan to see an array of macro subjects, including hooded nudibranchs, colorful shrimp, decorator crabs and an abundance of bottom-dwelling fish to keep even the most seasoned macro photographer busy. Larger subjects like the colorful red Irish lord, sculpin, rockfish, halibut, and if you are lucky, a giant Pacific octopus may be spotted on any dive.

Accommodations at the rustic, yet comfortable fishing lodge bring me back to childhood memories at summer camp where the days are long (20 hours of sunlight) and there are endless activities in nature. A favorite topside activity is skiff rides in search of bald eagles, sea otters, river otters, deer, elk and bear. Visit: ronwatkinsphotography.com



Hooded nudibranch. Exposure: ISO 200, f/20, 1/320s

Eagle (above). Exposure: ISO 1250, f/6.3, 1/1600s. Gear: Nikon D800 camera, Nikon 200-500mm lens; Salmon shark (top left). Exposure: ISO 400, f/11, 1/200s

