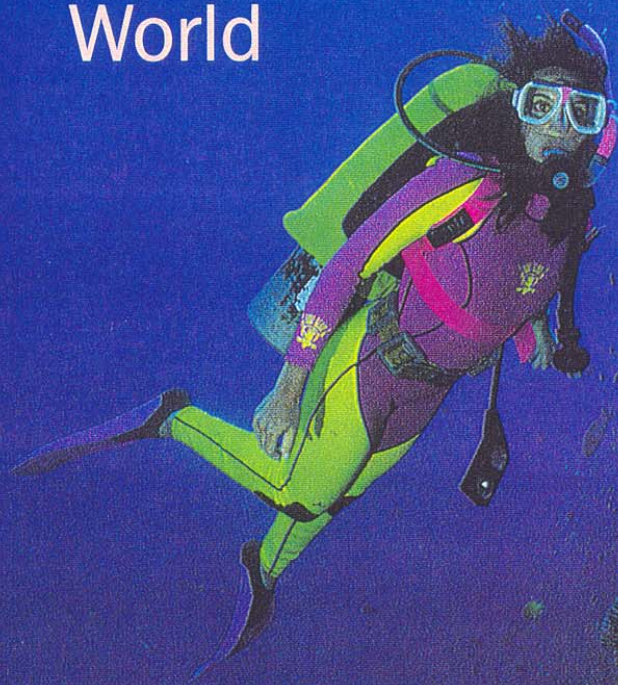


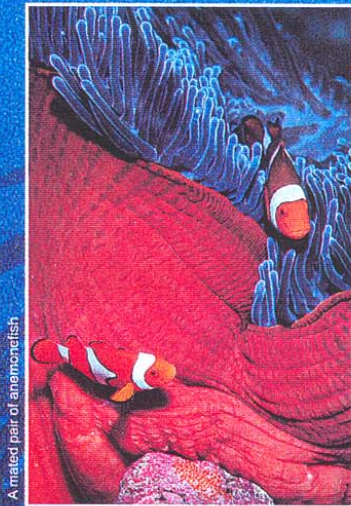
# Underwater Adventures

By Judy DiEdwardo

Scuba  
Diving  
and  
Snorkeling  
Around  
the  
World



Nothing compares to the beauty and excitement of life beneath the surface of our planet's seas, where a kaleidoscopic explosion of living color awaits discovery. In fact, "The Greatest Show on Earth" isn't under the big top at all. For the snorkeler and the scuba diver, it lies in the underwater realm of



A mated pair of anemonefish

inner space. • If you've ever been lulled by the hypnotic tranquillity of an aquarium, imagine actually float-



Tiny juvenile clinging crabs

ing in a weightless wonderland among a slow-motion parade of exotic marine life, where exploring beyond

the next reef is your only concern. Most surprising to the first-time snorkeler is the diversity of marine

life of this delicate ecosystem and the prairie-like vastness of the ocean floor. For those who can't resist the temptation to venture farther, scuba diving allows for unparalleled levels of exploration. Modern

equipment and training make it easier and more comfortable than ever to meet the natural world eye to eye. •

Whether your travels take you to the crystalline beaches of the Caribbean, the tropical islands of the Bahamas, or to more exotic locales in the South Pacific, a unique and compelling world will greet you. The only question is, where to go to first? Perhaps we can help with a few suggestions to make your dive trip both pleasurable and unforgettable.

## All Aboard

The sun has yet to breach the distant horizon, yet the pink-blue veil of early morning light illuminates the water's velvety smooth surface. We move like sure, dark shadows on the aft deck of the live-aboard dive boat, eagerly preparing for the day's first dive.



Live-aboard diving in the Bahamas by Greg Johnson

Groggy from a late night of entertainment aboard our floating hotel, I follow the scent of freshly brewed coffee to the main salon where our group of 12 gathers for a briefing on the site's unique topography and marine life. We will explore five different sites today, beginning with a predawn visit to one of the area's most splendid coral beds, followed by spectacular wall dives in the afternoon before capping off the day with a night dive.

The only passengers not present above deck are the galley crew. They are busy down below preparing a sumptuous breakfast of cheddar cheese omelettes, hot buttered waffles, and crisp sausages for us to enjoy after our first dive.

One final equipment check and we're ready. Dressed in a multicolored array of wet suits and gear, we back-roll overboard like choreographed acrobats into the warm, azure water. The chorus of laughter subsides as we slip below the surface and descend to a new world.

rents restrict it to advanced-level divers.

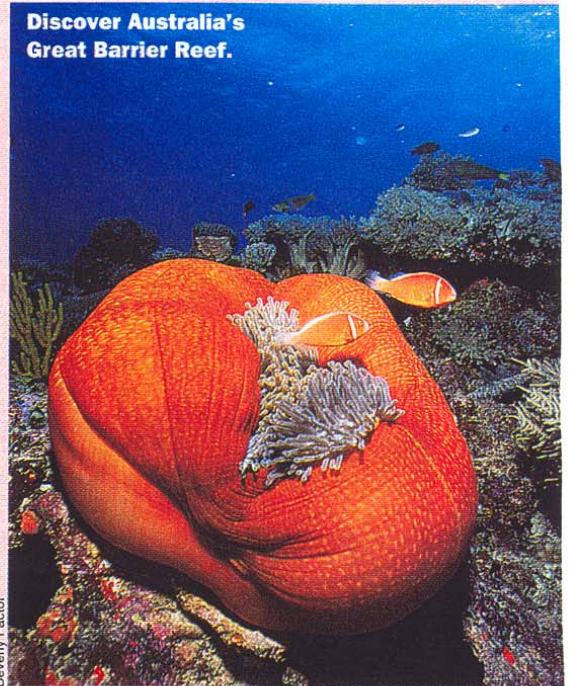
**Tugboat Wreck** – At 90 feet, this site is one of the best deep-water dives.

After passing through stunning formations of brain, star, and sheet coral, the wreck of the old tugboat comes into sight.

## Australia's Great Barrier Reef

The Great Barrier Reef stretches more than 1,200 miles across the northeastern continental shelf of Australia. It is one of the most diverse ecosys-

### Discover Australia's Great Barrier Reef.



Beverly Factor

tems on the planet with 1,500 species of fish and more than 400 species of coral, including hundreds of hard, reef-building corals, making it a spectacular scuba diving and snorkeling destination. Contrary to its name, the Great Barrier Reef is actually a broken maze of nearly 2,500 individual reefs and more than 600 islands and coral keys.

### Great Barrier Reef DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Townsville** – This site is the jump-off point for boat trips to Kelso Reef's scuba diving and snorkeling sites and is home to the Great

## Reef Bound

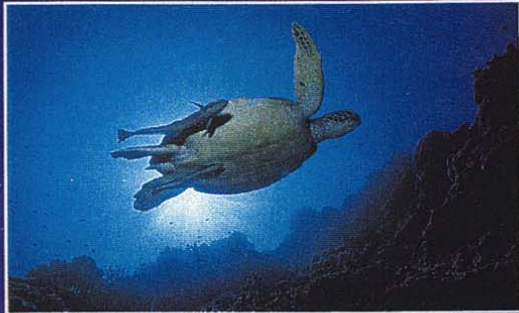
No one gets to Fiji by accident. And even if one were to do so, he would be fortunate to reach land after traversing thousands of miles of vast ocean. And what a land it is! This nation of 800 verdant islands in the shimmering blue southwestern Pacific Ocean is a veritable utopia of mountainous scenery, unspoiled beaches, and some of the world's most exotic underwater plant and animal life. So it's not difficult to imagine why resident Jean-Michel Cousteau chose these islands as his own Shangri-la.

Although geologically similar to other reef systems in the Indo-Pacific Basin, Fiji differs in one important way – its biological diversity is extremely pronounced.

The invertebrates found in these waters are too diverse to catalog, and the fish populations are among the planet's most varied. Over 35 species of angelfish and butterflyfish alone are found here, as well as the barracuda, bottle-nosed dolphin, pilot whale, and sea turtle.

These islands showcase one of the most spectacular arrays of corals found anywhere. One need only swim a few feet to see some of the 400 species of coral found here, including Fiji's remarkable "bommies." Dropping down in the crystal clear water, I am greeted by these huge, colorful coral colonies that rise to just below the ocean's surface. Although they appear massive and indestructible, coral reefs are extremely delicate, and the living organisms that create them must be protected from human touch.

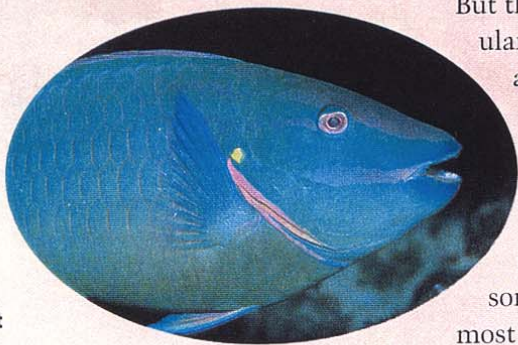
Although I have chosen an outlying reef to explore, Fiji's numerous barrier reefs and sheltered lagoons are ideal for shore-based snorkeling excursions. But what about the venomous lionfish or banded sea snakes known to live in these waters? Not a problem, my guide assures me. "Enjoy the view," he laughs, "snorkelers aren't considered part of their food chain."



A sea turtle in the depths

### Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Great Barrier Reef Aquarium.

**Heron Island** – One of the more popular dive sites, Heron Island has easy access and marked dive sites.



Parrotfish are found in waters throughout the world.

**Lady Elliot Island** – Located in the Capricornia section at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef, this island boasts easily accessible shipwrecks.

## Bay Islands, Honduras

Until several years ago, these Central American islands were considered among the diving world's best-kept secrets. But the word is out, particularly regarding Guanaja and Roatán and the fabulous reefs that surround them. Portions of the reefs are within easy reach of the beach, making for some of Honduras's most stellar shore dives by day as well as night. Marine life is abundant, including rare basket starfish, octopus, sea cucumbers, and squirrelfish that come to life at night.

Photographs by Norbert Wu

## Tobago

Tobago is a true nature lover's haven, replete with a bountiful population of marine life that thrives in the turquoise waters of Batteaux Bay.

**The History of SCUBA** While Jacques Cousteau is widely thought to be the first to don scuba gear and explore the ocean depths, there were several other intrepid men who began to experiment with scuba diving long before the legendary Frenchman took his first breath below the water's surface.

- **1865** – French inventors Rouquayrol and Denayrouse developed a surface-supported air system that was carried on the diver's back. Unfortunately, the air capacity of the system was severely limited. This was the apparatus described in Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, written four years after the inventors had made their device public.
- **1879** – Henry Fleuss invented a closed-circuit breathing apparatus that functioned only with pure oxygen – a toxic gas when pressurized and consumed at depth. However, it was the forerunner of the present-day method of using compressed air.
- **1926** – Yves Le Prieur invented the first steel cylinder used for storing compressed air. The tank was worn on the diver's back and came equipped with an air hose and mouthpiece. The drawback of the apparatus was its inability to regulate air flow.
- **1939** – Dr. Christian Lambertsen developed the first self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (SCUBA) to be used by a large number of divers. The rebreathing feature of Lambertsen's device, which eliminated the waste of gas supply by recirculating it, is still in use today by commercial and military divers.
- **1943** – Jacques Cousteau and Emile Gagnan invented the "Aqua Lung," which incorporated a demand regulator with the use of tanks to provide air flow to the diver as needed. Although the exhaled gas was lost, the "Aqua Lung" became the forerunner of modern recreational scuba gear.

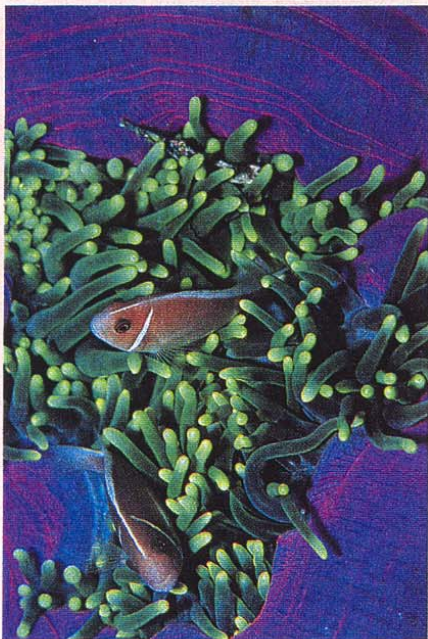
## Oahu

Located on the southern tip of Oahu, Hanauma Bay has helped put Oahu on the map as one of the world's most popular underwater destinations. Because the bay lies in a volcanic crater where it is protected from strong waves and swells, it is an excellent diving and snorkeling site, particularly for novices. The area close to the shore is very shallow, but the depths past the first reef provide plenty of walls to explore. The topography and marine life are extremely varied.

### Oahu

#### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Lanai Lookout** – Located near Hanauma Bay, this site has sea life clustered along its sloping wall and steep reef. An underwater cave cuts deep into the island. This location is best for experienced divers.



Norbert Wu

**Anemonefish live among the tentacles of anemones.**

## Turks and Caicos Islands

Pristine beaches coupled with some of the planet's most unspoiled reefs await the scuba diver and snorkeler who ventures to these idyllic islands. One of the last Caribbean diving frontiers, the Turks and Caicos Islands boast some 200 miles of virgin walls and pristine coral reefs. Underwater topography varies greatly from shallow reefs to vast tongue-and-groove reefs that edge a deep trench of 7,000 feet.

### Turks and Caicos DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Providenciales** – The remarkable walls of North-west Point begin at depths of 50 feet off this island.

**West Caicos** – This island is a popular destination for dive boats and live-aboard vessels. Here, a two-mile wall provides a great view of sponge formations.

**South Caicos** – Because of the abundance of deep-water fish, South Caicos is known as the big-fish capital of the Turks and Caicos.

**Salt Cay** – Located at the southernmost tip of the island chain, Salt Cay has wonderful shallow coral gardens for the snorkeler.

## Heart of Darkness

From Key Largo to Key West, the 126-mile-long island chain that makes up the Florida Keys is renowned for world-class diving and snorkeling. Little wonder why: Thriving here are some of the world's most unusual species of hard and soft corals and tropical fish. In fact, second only to diving these waters during the day is taking the plunge at night when the ink black sea becomes a stunning backdrop for a new array of sights. That's next on our itinerary.



A lurid rock beauty by Stephen Fink/WATERHOUSE

Illuminated by powerful handheld lights, the reef explodes with unexpected colors and activity as the nocturnal world shifts into high gear. I revel in the opportunity to view those species that venture out only at night. Just as one finds with the daytime inhabitants, some of the nocturnal species remain partially hidden in crevices, while others are more active, abandoning the safety of hidden coral ledges and tunnels to swim freely along the multihued reef. The

first to appear in the beam of light are two black-and-white speckled moray eels. Their tapered, elongated bodies undulate like ribbons across the reef top.

Next comes an olive brown balloonfish, comically bobbing its way along the reef like an untethered dirigible. As our lights sweep across the reef, two iridescent blue-green pupils glowing from bulbous eyes are revealed in the darkness. From its hiding place, this creature remains unidentifiable. As we round a slight curve in the reef, we spot a group of five velvety black-and-yellow rock beauties darting frantically as they guard a patch of coral that is decidedly theirs.

The parade continues with a wonderland of scientific phenomenon, replete with specialized costuming reserved exclusively for a nighttime soiree. In the absence of sunlight, strawberry-colored anemones deepen to a brilliant crimson; wide-eyed cardinalfish show off their pumpkin coloring; pea green moray eels turn chartreuse; and billions of microscopic, bioluminescent organisms produce their own light to twinkle like tiny neon stars. Ah, the splendors of night diving!

## Wrecks of Time



Wreck diving in Micronesia by Al Hornsby

**A**part from the utter beauty of the Micronesian islands, I had not fully understood their place in time and history until I explored their volcanic beginnings from beneath the sea. Scattered over millions of square miles in the western Pacific, the 2,000 islands that compose Micronesia are commonly divided into eight groups, each with its own stunning tropical attractions: Guam, the Republic of Palau, the Northern Mariana Islands, Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk, the Marshall Islands, and Kosrae.

On this trip, I have decided to visit Chuuk Lagoon to dive one of the greatest underwater museums in the world. The lagoon is the resting place of more than 100 ships, planes, and submarines lost in a fierce World

War II battle between the Japanese Imperial Fleet and Allied carrier planes. For the past 50 years they have remained on the bottom of the ocean virtually undisturbed, making Chuuk Lagoon one of world's premier wreck-diving sites.

The 435-foot *Fujikawa Maru* rests upright in 30 to 110 feet of water, its bow and stern guns fully intact. The holds contain spent shells, machine guns, and a Zero fuselage. Other wrecks are equally spectacular, including a Japanese fighter plane lying upside down in 20 feet of water and the 500-foot fleet oiler *Shinkoku Maru* with its treasure trove of artifacts, including telephones, bottles, first-aid kits, and barrels.

Floating above these sleeping giants, I am awed that such tragedy could be transformed into such beauty. The answer lies in the warm tropical water, prolific marine life, and ocean currents that have turned these steel phantoms into spectacular artificial reefs. And the wreckage grows more ornate each year, thanks to brilliantly colored soft corals, sponges, and anemones that cling to their encrusted hulls. Perhaps they are the quiet caretakers of this silent garden. I imagine, as I bid farewell to Chuuk Lagoon and follow my silver-domed bubbles upward.

**Turtle Canyon and Koko Head** – Located on the south shore, these shallow-water sites are protected from heavy swells and are

usually accessible when other areas are rough. For the novice diver and the diver who enjoys photographing marine life,

these areas are good for snapping octopuses, reef fish, and sea turtles.

**Six Fingers** – Named for the six fingers of the coral

reef that rise from the ocean floor, this southern site is home to a variety of marine life, including eels and octopuses.

## UNDERWATER ADVENTURES

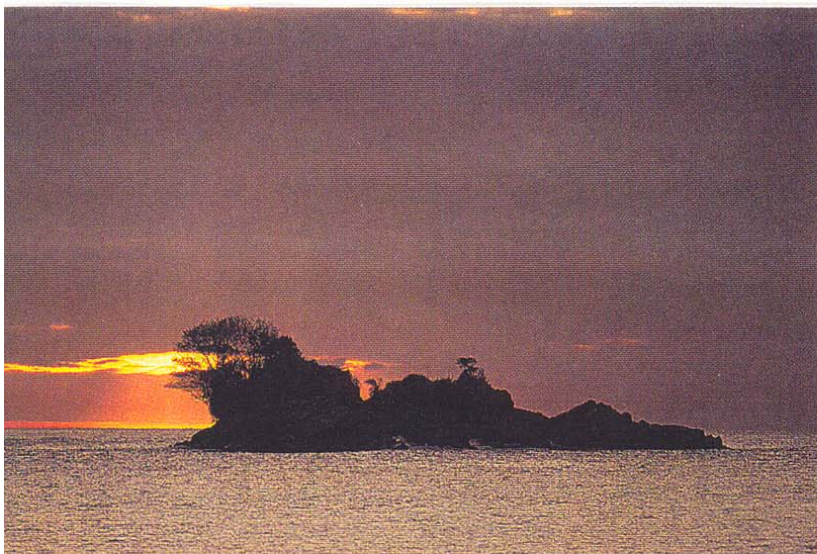
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### Professional Association of Diving Instructors, Inc.

**(PADI)** If you're ready to take the plunge, getting started with your open-water certification may be easier than you think. The Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) offers comprehensive training courses throughout the world. The classes are even approved by the American Council on Education for college-level credit. For information on a PADI facility near you, call your local dive shop or PADI headquarters at (800) 729-7234. Or, visit the PADI Web site at: <http://www.padi.com>

**Look Who's Diving** PADI, the world's largest diver certification organization, estimates that a record-breaking 800,000 people throughout the world either received scuba certifications or were introduced to the sport through Discover Scuba Diving programs in 1995. PADI statistics indicate that women make up more than a third of all new divers.

**Safety First** Divers Alert Network (DAN) is a nonprofit group backed by the world's largest association of recreational divers, and it supports vital research and services that benefit all recreational divers. DAN provides a 24-hour diving emergency medical hotline based at Duke University Medical Center. DAN can be reached at 800-446-2671 or on the Web at <http://www.dan.ycg.org>



Sunset over Tobago's tranquil waters.

### Tobago

#### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Arnos Vale Reef** – The best areas on the island's western coast are between Pigeon Point and Castara, including Arnos Vale Reef. This reef is a favorite because of the variety of rays that frequent the area.

**Speyside and Charlotteville** – The northeast coast's best diving is between Speyside and Charlotteville, including the offshore islands of Little Tobago and St. Giles, where rock formations like London Bridge make underwater exploration fun.

## The Hole Story

Home to the longest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere and one of the largest blue holes in the world, Belize is the preferred choice among scuba divers looking for exotic destinations to explore. In fact, along with Australia's Great Barrier Reef, Belize's unique underwater topography ranks among the world's finest.

Located deep within Lighthouse Reef, the Blue Hole measures an astounding 300 feet in diameter and is 400 feet deep. Even underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau was awed by the phenomenon when he first set his sights on it. And now it's my turn to visit Belize's best-known scuba diving attraction. Descending for the first time into this famous dome-shaped limestone sinkhole, I am consumed with wonder.

The vast hole is chock-full of brilliantly colored marine life that appears to be propelled by unseen currents from below. The water is bathtub warm and the visibility is astounding. Sharing its eastern border with the Caribbean, Belize has excellent diving conditions. The visibility off



The Blue Hole at Lighthouse Reef by Darrell Jones

the coast is rarely less than 100 feet and the water temperature hovers at a delightful 80 degrees year-round.

Tomorrow we will visit one of the country's other diving attractions, Ambergris Caye, the largest of Belize's 200-plus islands. It is a premier destination for scuba divers and snorkelers because of its stellar reefs and unrivaled conditions. As we motor toward the 25-mile-long island, my boatmates talk excitedly about the adventures ahead.

I, however, am miles away – still deep within Belize's unforgettable Blue Hole, reliving in splendid detail the intensity of its natural beauty and the bounty of its extraordinary marine life.

**Lesleen M. is a 165-foot freighter that lies in just 30 to 60 feet of water. Daini-Koyo-Maru is a huge, 250-foot Japanese ship lying in depths of 60 to 105 feet.**

**Pinnacles** – Named for four seamounts that rise from the ocean floor, this is a stunning 70-foot dive.

## Tahiti

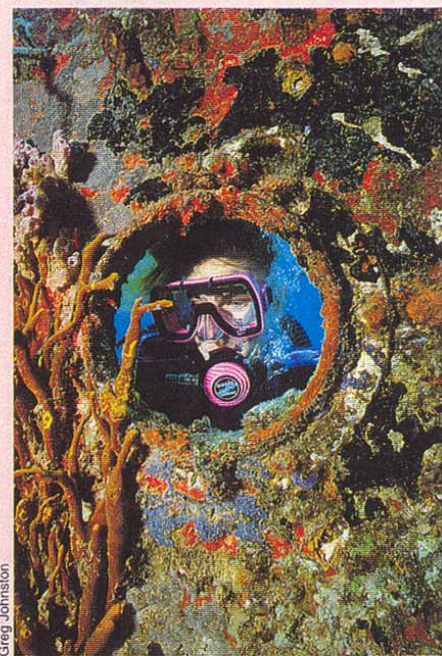
The largest of the more than 100 islands and atolls that compose French Polynesia, Tahiti is a paradise like no other. The island is a verdant wonderland of mountains, rain forests, and waterfalls, while its waters offer superb diving and snorkeling for all skill levels. Typically

calm surface conditions and minimal currents on its western coast have earned Tahiti the reputation as one of the world's safest diving spots.

### Tahiti DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Vavi Area** – Located on the exposed ocean side of the reef, this site features a series of drop-offs. With its multicolored sea fans and gorgonians, the area is a real treat for underwater photographers.

**Underwater Fresh Springs** – Fresh water meets the sea 100 yards off the outer reef at this underwater pinnacle. The mixture attracts an abundance of sea life.



Greg Johnston

A watery window off the U.S. Virgin Islands.

## U.S. Virgin Islands

highlighted by spectacular sunken coral gardens and dramatic ledges and drop-offs, the reefs dotting the waters off St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John offer abundant diving opportunities for all abilities. Two-thirds of St. John is a national park, and the protected waters are home to a variety of marine life.

### U.S. Virgin Islands DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Andreas Reef** – Located off St. Thomas, this reef boasts a wide variety of soft and hard corals at depths of 30 to 70 feet.

**Eagle Shoals** – This area located off Coral Bay on St. John's southeastern coast offers intermediate divers a number of interesting caves and overhead ledges to explore.

## Bay Islands

### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Valley of the Kings** – This area off Roatán provides the opportunity for an unforgettable wall dive.

**Prince Albert** – This sunken 140-foot island freighter off Roatán is a good site for viewing coral and tropical fish.

**Bayman Bay Drop** – A pop-

ular spot among divers is this site off Guanaja's northwestern coast.

**Jim's Silver Lode** – This spot off Guanaja features a deep-water canyon.

## Bermuda

There more than 250 shipwrecks in the waters surrounding Bermuda have given the archipelago the nickname "Shipwreck Capital of the World." Thirty-five sites are considered accessible, and most lie on shallow reefs, enabling divers to enjoy a longer bottom time. The peak season for wreck diving is mid-March through November, during which visibility ranges from 80 to 100 feet. Night diving is popular also, although variable weather conditions can be a limiting factor.

### Bermuda

#### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Constellation** – The 192-foot, four-masted American schooner lies in less than 30 feet of water.

**Cristóbal Colón** – This vessel has the distinction of being Bermuda's largest shipwreck at 499 feet in length.

**Hermes** – At a depth of 80 feet, this is one of the most accessible deep wrecks. The 165-foot hulled vessel is also Bermuda's most popular wreck, primarily because she is still upright and intact.

## Bonaire

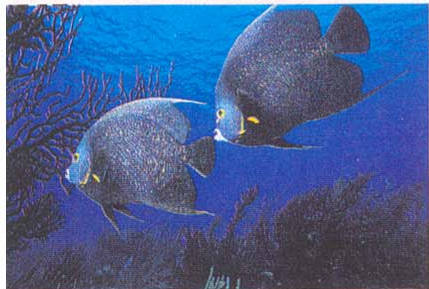
Long considered the shore-diving capital of the world, with some of the best-preserved reefs in the Caribbean, Bonaire is legendary for its diving and snorkeling as well as its no-nonsense attitude toward





marine conservation. It was on this Dutch Caribbean island that mooring buoys were first widely used to protect the precious reefs from anchor damage.

Bonaire is unique among diving destinations in the Caribbean because its waters – up to 200 feet deep – have been designated an official marine park.



Greg Johnston

French angelfish are common on the reefs of Bonaire.

## Bonaire

### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Sampler** – Located on the north coast of Klein Bonaire, this site is ideal for all skill levels.

**Punt Vierkant** – This site marks the beginning of a double-reef system where intermittently strong currents and 100-foot depths are best suited to the intermediate and advanced diver.

**Hilma Hooker** – Bonaire's most famous shipwreck provides an ideal dive with its light currents and depths of 60 to 100 feet.

## British Virgin Islands

The 30 islands that make up the British Virgin Islands are part of a huge underwater shelf

## UNDERWATER ADVENTURES

### SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

### British Virgin Islands

#### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**The Baths** – Located on Virgin Gorda, this site is ideal for snorkelers.

**RMS Rhone** – This perfectly preserved wreck that went down in a hurricane in 1867 lies off Salt Island. Other wrecks include the *Chikuzen*, northwest of Virgin Gorda.

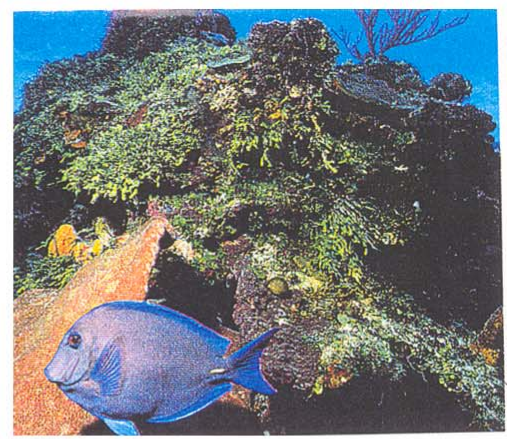
**Blonde Rock** – Tunnels, caves, overhangs and depths of 10 to 60 feet make this a popular site.

**Painted Walls** – This site provides an easy 30-foot dive and features gullies decorated with colorful sponges and corals.

**The Chimney** – Located off the south side of Great Dog island, this beautiful 60-foot dive site is ideal for novice divers.

## Cozumel

For the ultimate drift diving experience among some of the Caribbean's most spectacular reefs, no place does it better than Cozumel. Unlike most boat diving, where divers explore a limited radius determined by the anchored boat, drifting through the water with the currents while being followed by the boat affords unparalleled exploration of greater stretches of reef, such as the well-known Santa Rosa Wall. While Cozumel is known primarily for its excellent scuba diving, several shallow-water reefs close to shore are ideal for snorkelers.



Beverly Factor

A blue tang cruises a reef off Cozumel.

## Cozumel

### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Palancar Reef** – The walls, caves, and coral gardens of Palancar offer a variety of stunning topography for exploration. With its underwater tunnels, steep vertical drops, and brightly colored corals, this site provides a breathtaking backdrop for photographers.

## Curaçao

On the largest island of the Netherlands Antilles, Americans are finally discovering what Europeans have known about for years – Curaçao's spectacular underwater vistas. Prized for its relaxed Caribbean lifestyle and distinct European flair, this island has more than 100 incomparable dive sites.

## Curaçao

### DIVE SITE HIGHLIGHTS

**Curaçao Underwater Park** – This 12½-mile preserve offers excellent sites for both the novice and advanced diver. The park caters to nondivers as well by providing tours in a cruising underwater observatory.

**Curaçao Wall** – This site features classic vertical drop-offs and steep ledges for excellent wall diving.

## Papua New Guinea

The islands of Papua New Guinea have long been famous for their towering mountain peaks and dense rain forests, but the area is fast becoming one of the best-known tropical dive locations in the world. Because it is relatively unfamiliar to many diving and snorkeling enthusiasts, Papua New Guinea provides the perfect opportunity to get away from it all and experience the thrill of being the first to explore the many coral keys and deserted atolls that dot these unspoiled islands.

## Rays in the Sun

No trip to Grand Cayman would be complete without experiencing Stingray City, one of the western Caribbean's most thrilling underwater attractions. The shallow waters of the island's North Sound is the site of one of the world's best 12-foot dives, and provide the ultimate opportunity to hang with the majestic stingrays that feed on the local mollusks and crustaceans.

What was once witnessed only by fishermen who tossed their leftover scraps overboard can now be seen and experienced by snorkelers and divers who hand-feed these magnificent creatures. Virtually every dive boat on the island conducts excursions to this landmark attraction, and ours is the first boat of the day.

Motoring out to the drop site, we learn some simple stingray anatomy and etiquette. These graceful creatures are guided primarily by their sense of smell. Rays feed by vacuuming food into their mouths between their blunt teeth. And although they are quite docile, they can inflict serious injury with their barbed, whiplike tails if threatened. Rule number one? Don't try to ride these powerful animals, our guide cautions.

On deck, the excitement is palpable as we grab our bags of squid before stepping into the warm, clear water. We kick down to the sandy bottom just a dozen feet below the surface and wait for the show to begin. Within seconds, an armada of stingrays appears, their fleshy slate gray bodies gliding between and around us like subaquatic extraterrestrials.

The moment of truth arrives. Placing a chunk of squid on my outstretched palm, I offer it to the ray nearest me. In one graceful motion, it descends and literally sucks the fish from my hand. The phenomenon is repeated until, too soon, our bags are empty. The thrill of getting close to these creatures, however, lingers for a lifetime.



Six-foot stingrays queuing for a handout by Norbert Wu



Greg Johnston

**The Baths at  
Virgin Gorda,  
British Virgin  
Islands.**

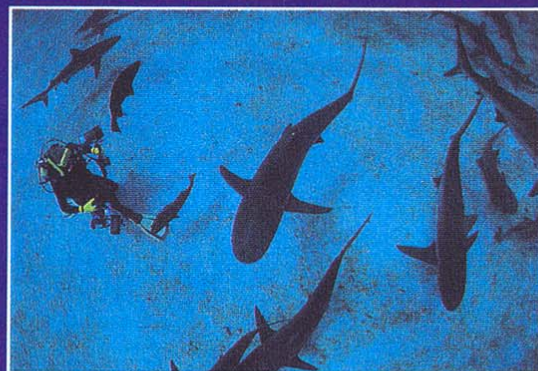
easily reached by the scuba diver and snorkeler. Like many of the reefs throughout the Caribbean, the reefs here provide an extraordinary opportunity to experience wreck diving. The "laid-back" atmosphere found throughout the islands is a large part of their appeal. You won't find huge boats crammed with divers here. Instead, local dive operators are happiest whiling away the hours top- and bottom-side with island visitors.

## Close Encounters

High noon. The sharks living here in the clear, warm waters of the Bahamas know that lunch is about to be served as we step from the dive boat platform and descend en masse to a sandy clearing 40 feet below. Excitement turns to fear as the first shark appears, tracing the periphery a few feet above our small group. By the time our leader arrives with his tightly secured feed box, more than a dozen sharks have begun circling us. Welcome to the adrenaline-rush experience of recreational shark feeding.

Our guide, who settles into position just 20 feet from the interested sharks, is armed with a chain mail glove. He extends small chunks of fish on the end of a four-foot-long pole spear to his hungry audience. In what first appears like a friendly game of musical chairs, the sharks circle the bait – powerful dorsal fins pumping their sleek, torpedolike bodies through the water. But the game soon ends when one shark breaks from the group. Ramming the pole spear with lightning speed, its powerful jaw pivots open and four sets of razor-sharp teeth clamp down hard on the bloodied meat, wrestling it free. The shark devours its prize and resumes its place in the circle above us. This demonstration is repeated until the feed box is empty. Wide-eyed and hearts pounding, we retreat to the surface, exhilarated and awed by our close encounters.

Bad reputations are hard to live down. And none has it worse than the shark. Of the 250 known shark species, only a few pose a threat to humans. Recreational shark expeditions are designed to separate fact from fiction and leave divers with a healthy respect for these ancient predators – not to mention the ultimate fish story.



Shark diving in the Bahamas by Norbert Wu