

S P O R T DIVING

ISSUE 163

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SRI LANKA'S
WRECK DIVES

**BRUNEI'S
TINY OCEAN
GEMS**

SORTING OUT
SEA SLUGS
PART 5

PALAU'S
MANTAS: BY
THE LIGHT OF
THE MOON

AUSTRALIA:
OSPREY REEF'S
INCREDIBLE
DEEP CORAL

YOUR CRITTER
FINDS IDENTIFIED

**CHINA'S
ANCIENT CAVES
OPEN TO DIVERS**

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK: ICELAND

RAJA AMPAT'S MAGICAL WEDA BAY

**DIVE MEDICINE: OXYGEN TOXICITY
AND CCR REBREATHING DIVING**

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY: MASTERING ADJUSTMENT LAYERS



PRINT POST APPROVED: PP 100003167
PPS 1484/04/2013(022969)

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WHITEOUT! WE SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SURPRISED. THE NORTHERN COAST OF ICELAND AT THE END OF WINTER DELIVERS BLINDING SNOW, 50 MPH WINDS, AND FRIGID TEMPERATURES – WHAT DID WE EXPECT?

THE LAND OF FIRE AND ICE

We were headed for Nesgjá, a recently discovered 'crack' in the Earth's surface, flooded with crystal clear water and home to some of the most awe-inspiring geological formations divers will ever encounter. Earlier in the day we'd left the small fishing village of Hjalteyri located 22 km north of Akureyri, and as we approached the dive site it was obvious this was frontier-style diving. After suiting up on a small snow-covered hill, we walked to the foreboding water, carefully chose a point of entry and jumped into

the 34 degree Fahrenheit water. We were instantly transported to a new world...

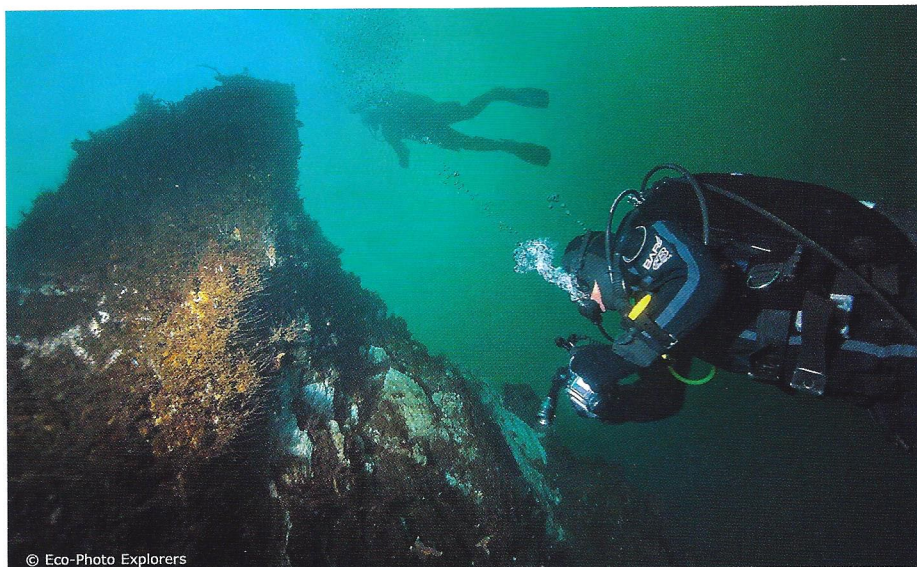
This land of contradiction is geologically and volcanically active, scarred from recent lava flows and contorted and twisted by the spreading of the earth. The mid-Atlantic ridge cuts right through the centre of Iceland, where volcanoes rise and the North American and Eurasian continental plates are ripping apart. In some areas, cracks in the Earth's crust have flooded with lava-filtered glacial melt, making for



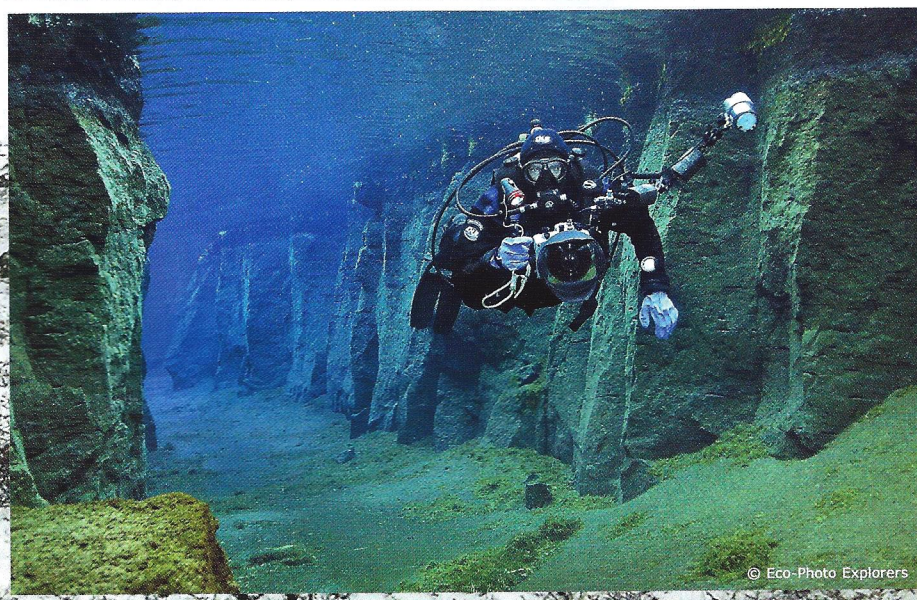
Main: The approach to the Nesla fissure
Opposite: Divers exploring Strytan's vents
A diver explores the Nesla fissure
Photographing the marine life of Strytan

unparalleled diving opportunities in crystal clear water with almost unlimited visibility. Along the coasts, there are myriads of diving opportunities in and around the many fjords and healthy populations of marine life. Perhaps most remarkable is the unique and precious dive site Strytan, which has the only known collection of hydrothermal vents within diveable depths.

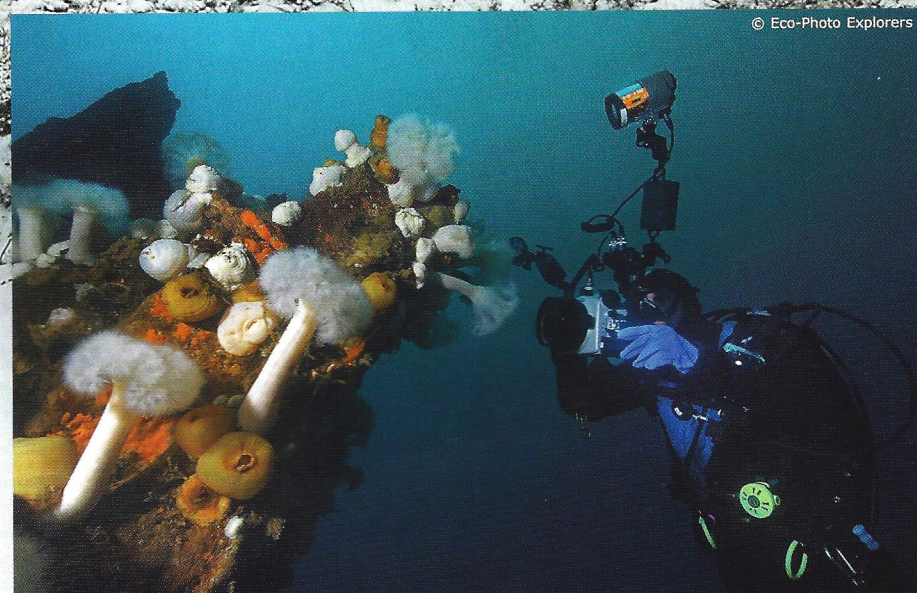
Our dives at Nesgjá took us through a winding corridor of boulders which had been created through a slow but jarring



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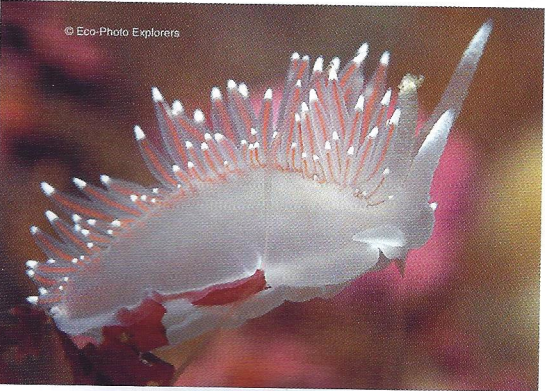
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ripping apart of the Earth's crust. The water here is pure and clear. Though there's no marine life to speak of, the dramatic rock formations and crystalline water deliver a memorable experience. We wound our way through the length of the crack, and then emerged into a lagoon of equally clear water. With depths never exceeding more than 30 feet, dive times here are limited by your air supply and your tolerance for the cold.



After a dive at Nesgjá, an interesting option is to visit the nearby site of Litla Á. Here, we dove in 63-degree F water, which emerges from various spots along the bottom like so many miniature geysers. With the air temperature hovering close to 10 degrees Fahrenheit, this dive was quite comfortable! Although the water is quite shallow, never reaching more than five or six feet in depth, the warm, clear water, the unique phenomenon of hot water emerging from the bottom and the occasional encounter with the large trout that make their home here make this a worthwhile visit.



In 1997 Erlendur Bogason discovered a hydrothermal vent in the dark water of the Eyja Fjord, located near to the town of Akureyri. Strytan, as this location has been named, rises from over 200 feet to nearly 50 feet below the surface. Hydrothermal vents usually exist many thousands of feet deep and Strytan is the shallowest known one in the world. A 'White Smoker', Strytan is a group of chimneys that emit very hot water (176 degrees Fahrenheit) and they're formed

by smectite, a white clay material that mixes with other crustal elements and minerals. Divers can explore the towering formations and will marvel at the marine life that abounds in these waters. Macro enthusiasts will find colourful nudibranchs, crustaceans, sponges, starfish and anemones. Swirling around the chimneys are schools of cod and pollack, and sharp-eyed divers will also encounter the curious lumpsucker fish and the ferocious looking wolf fish. Despite the fascinating marine life, however, our attention was repeatedly transfixed by the flowing hot water, which creates its own thermocline in the cold ocean water. For a unique photo opportunity, divers can carefully remove their gloves and warm their hands in the hot water spewing from the vents...just be advised to not get too close!

Two hours outside of Reykjavik is Thingvallavatn Lake, home to a ruptured landscape torn apart by geological forces. In and around the lake are many fissures and tectonic cracks, many of them filled with glacial melt water from Iceland's second largest glacier, Langjökull. This water, filtered for 50 years through miles and miles of lava rock, emerges here as clear and clean as possible. It is here that divers can visit Silfra, one of these geological cracks and one of the most iconic dive sites in all of Iceland.

At Silfra divers descend a set of stairs installed for safety and access, and then enter a labyrinth of rock walls, boulder piles, cavities and crevices all filled with some of the world's purest water. In fact, divers are encouraged to taste the water along the way! Unique to Silfra, divers can actually reach out and simultaneously touch both the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. Diving here is akin to being transported to another world...with visibility



exceeding 300 feet, temperatures hovering around 34 degrees Fahrenheit and a gentle flowing current. The dives are magical and transformative.

Iceland's diving opportunities extend to shipwrecks, cod spawning activities and the chance to dive with seabirds off the northern coast.

Topside, Iceland is an amazing contrast between civilization, history and wilderness. With only 320,000 people residing in the entire country, many of them in the main city of Reykjavik, much of the country's landscape is natural and undisturbed. Visitors can experience black, barren fields of pumice and lava stone, breathtaking waterfalls, lovely seaside communities and dramatic mountains. Home to more than 30,000 live volcanoes, the land is relatively young and is still being formed. It is also a country steeped in history, including strong cultural ties to the Vikings, and is home to the site of the very first Parliament meeting in the year 930 AD.

We emerged from our final dives in Iceland to the crisp, cold winter air and scrambled over the jagged rocks of Silfra, feeling exhilarated and alive. This is what Iceland does to you...it gets under your skin and injects a sense of wonder about the natural world. It creates a feeling of being part of the re birth of the Earth itself. Swimming into the cradle of

Facing page:

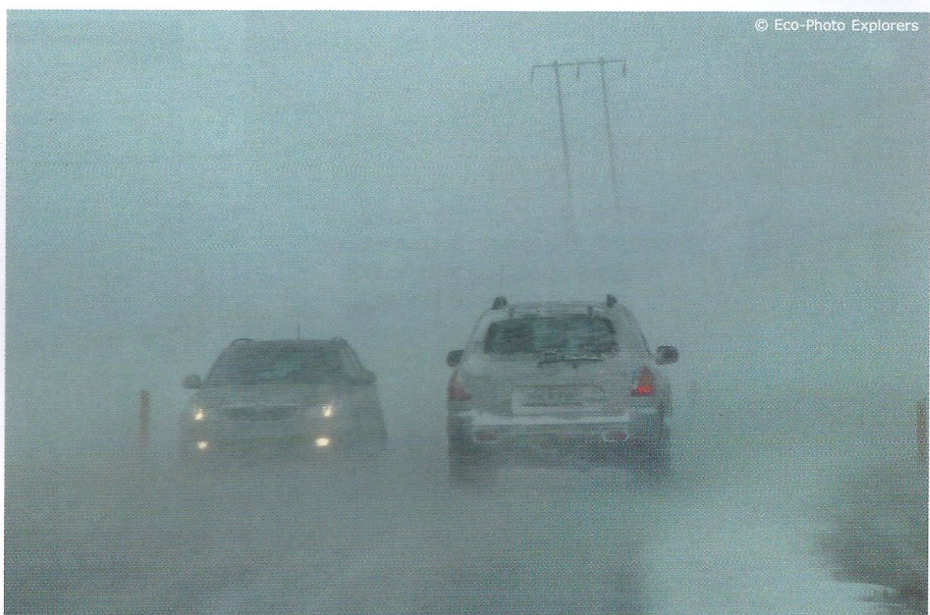
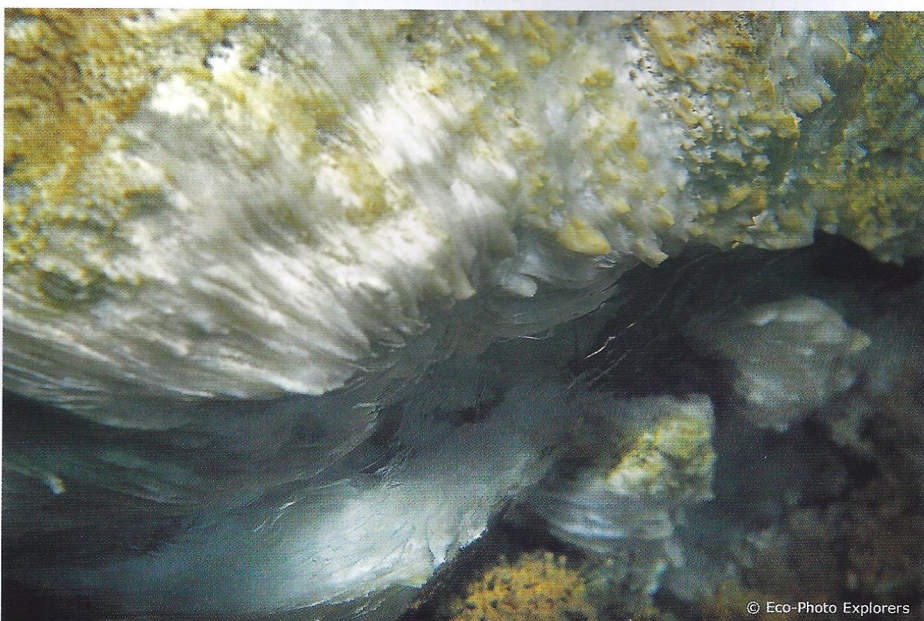
A giant stride into the Nesla fissure
The ferocious looking but harmless wolf fish
Cold water nudibranchs can be found at Strytan

The weird looking lumpsucker fish

This page:

An underwater hot water spring
Strytan's chimneys are covered with colorful anemones

Hot water flowing from Strytan carries minerals to continue building the structure
Whiteout conditions in Northern Iceland!





Eco-Photo Explorers



From top left: Author Christopher Weaver examines a natural steam vent.

Stable and strong vessels are used for cold water dive adventures here.

Exploring the Blue Lagoon at Silfra.

geological creation is humbling, exciting and perspective shifting. Far from the maddening crowds, Iceland still retains a sense of distance and isolation. All this, just five hours from New York by air!

Getting There

International visitors arrive in Keflavik Airport. Most passengers do not require a visa as long as their stay does not exceed 3 months. Internal transport to other regions in Iceland is either by driving or domestic air travel. There are domestic airports in

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Left: Iceland's geologically active landscape has many waterfalls
 Below: An abandoned herring factory is home to the Strytan Dive Center

Reykjavik, Akureyri, and several other towns. Drive time Reykjavik to Akureyri is 4-5 hours, air travel is 45 minutes.

Baggage Allowances vary for international carriers, so check before you leave! Note: Some carriers enforce weight and size limits for carry-on bags.

Weather The northernmost point of Iceland is only 30 miles south of the Arctic Circle, so winters are long, generally from September to April. In mid winter, daylight is almost nonexistent and in summer days are almost 24 hours long. Due to the moderating influence of the Gulf Stream, winter weather in the south can be milder than in New York or Zurich! Winter is harsher in the north, with

fierce storms, wind-driven snow and low temperatures.

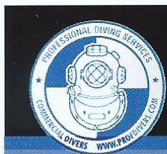
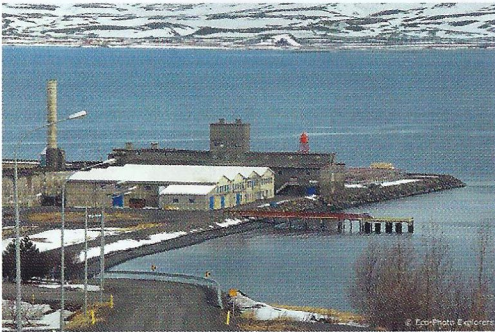
Local Currency The Icelandic Krona, but US Dollars and Euro are often accepted.

Electricity Voltage: 220-240V/50Hz
 Primary socket type: Europlug, Schuko

Travel adapter: Round pin universal plug

Scuba Diving

DIVE.IS is a Five Star PADI Dive Center in Reykjavik offering varied multi-day tours and single day dives, plus training and equipment rental. Strytan Dive Center in Hjalteyri, near Akureyri, is owned and operated by Erlundur Bogason. Skjaldarvik Guesthouse is good to stay in when diving Strytan. Good homemade food, with comfortable rooms. Reykjavik has a recompression chamber.



PROFESSIONAL DIVERS TRAINING ACADEMY

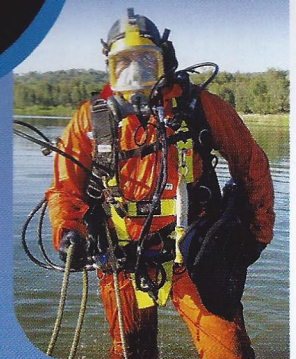
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PART 1 SCIENTIFIC IN VANUATU 19TH MAY (2 WEEKS)

