

MARCH 2020

ISSUE 3

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# Scuba & H2O

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$20

ADVENTURES MAGAZINE



24 FLORIDA DIVING

50 WHALE OF A TALE  
SERIES

SCUBEE HONEY 64





Photo: G.P. Schmahli, NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries

VISIT ONE OF THE  
WORLD'S MOST SPECTACULAR DIVING DESTINATIONS:

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# FLOWER GARDEN BANKS

## NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

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With fertile coral reefs and sponges in kaleidoscopic hues, and visibility reaching more than 100 feet, a dive in the sanctuary often leaves visitors awestruck. Here in the Gulf of Mexico, about 100 miles south of the Texas-Louisiana border, manta rays, loggerhead turtles, hammerhead sharks and hundreds of species of fish and invertebrates, along with the occasional massive whale shark, complete the underwater tableau.

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary is one of 14 federally designated underwater areas that promote recreation, stewardship, environmental protection and ocean research.

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation thanks Dive News Network Media Group for its support of America's national marine sanctuaries.



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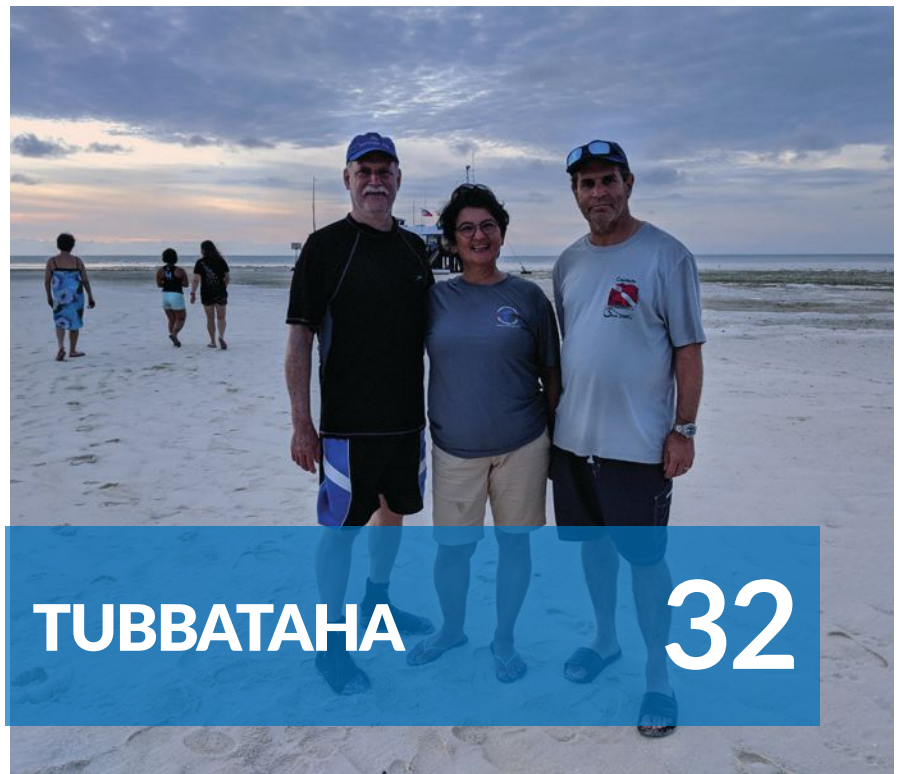
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## Publisher's Note: March is here!

Welcome to the March 2020 edition of Scuba & H2O Adventures Magazine!

You can't scroll through social media or turn on the news without being bombarded by coronavirus (COVID-19) updates. And while it may seem the globe is being hysterical or in some cases not hysterical enough, we should take pause and evaluate how we can affect our own personal health and protect those around us from infection. Divers should take extra care to disinfect equipment, especially those items designed for personal use. The CDC notes that household cleaners are as effective against COVID-19 as they are against other traditional flu and cold viruses. A concentration of 10% bleach solution is also effective but we recommend following manufacturer guidelines – and as always – rinse with fresh water. Hot soapy water and some scrubbing is also recommended. If you rent equipment, you should already be protecting yourself against communicable diseases – but if you must – wash the equipment before use. The most effective way of helping you and your loved ones stay healthy this cold and flu season is to wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, and to wipe down common areas routinely.

In the meantime, enjoy the magazine. We meet some great people making a difference across the United States. Have some spare change and want an exciting adventure? Visit Florida and discover some great diving!

Stay healthy and happy diving!

See you in April.

*Selene Muldowney*

### About the Cover:

Key Dives Operations Manager and Captain Jason Adams with perfect buoyancy control poses with hawksbill turtle on a sixty foot reef off Islamorada, Florida. Key Dives has been instrumental in starting I-CARE reef restoration program to insure healthy coral for future generations along with Mote Marine Labs, Dr. Kylie Smith, PhD and many dive operators, hotels and resorts.

### FOR THE RECORD: CONTACT:

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Publisher: Selene Muldowney | selene.dnn@gmail.com  
 Senior Editor: John Tapley | dnn.editor@outlook.com  
 Interns: Andrew Pierzchala  
 Reagan Muldowney  
 Regional Correspondents: Gary Lehman - NE  
 John C. Fine - SE  
 Environmental Consultant: Bonnie McKenna  
 Advertising Sales: Rick Stratton  
 rickstratton.dnn@gmail.com  
 www.ScubaH2OMag.com

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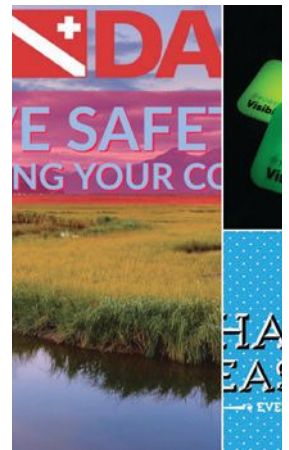
SOUND  
BITES

SCUBAH2OMAG

Shout-outs!

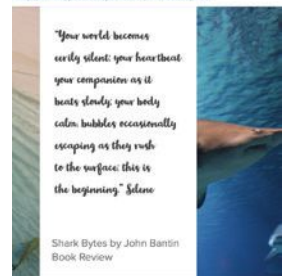
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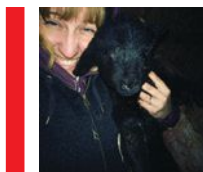
## INSTAGRAM

Book review on John Bantini's impressive impression on sharks! Shark Bytes is a great read - a must read for any ocean aficionado. John Bantini, Fernhurst Books  
 #bookreview #sharkbytes #fernhurstbooks #sharkbitesbookreview  
<http://www.fppubs.com/publication/?v=578820&a=68>

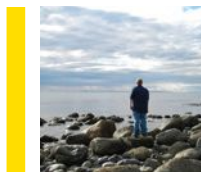




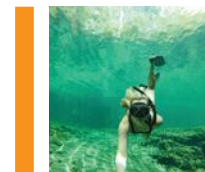
# Regular Contributors



SELENE  
MULDOWNEY



JOHN TAPLEY

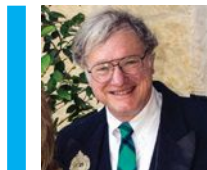


CAITLYN  
RUSKELL

Caitlyn is Content Writer and Editor for Divers Alert Network in Durham, NC. She is an active PADI and NAUI Instructor, RAID Rebreather Instructor and graduate of the University of Georgia.

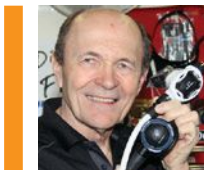


A BEACH IS NOT ONLY A SWEEP OF SAND, BUT SHELLS OF SEA CREATURES, THE SEA GLASS, THE SEAWEED, THE INCONGRUOUS OBJECTS WASHED UP BY THE OCEAN. **HENRY GRUNWALD**



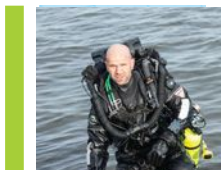
GARY  
LEHMAN

Gary came to diving later than most, and loves to get away when he can – which is not enough! Some of the most memorable experiences ever for Gary have been underwater with his club buddies, turtles and sharks! When not diving or thinking about it, he writes about it!



ALEC PEIRCE

Alec Peirce is recognized as one of the finest scuba diving presenters of his generation. He holds instructor certifications with seven different scuba training agencies plus many honorary awards from the scuba industry including the prestigious "Platinum Pro 5000 Diver".



ERIC  
PETKOVIC

Erik is an explorer, author, maritime historian, shipwreck researcher, and technical diver with over 20 years of diving experience. Erik has been featured in dive publications worldwide, is the author of three books, and regularly presents at the largest dive shows and museums in the country.



JAMES  
LAPENTA

I am a recreational and technical SCUBA Instructor whose primary goal is to create divers that are safe, skilled, and competent. I'd rather lose business than certify an unqualified diver. It is my moral and ethical duty to call out unsafe practices, standards, and those who defend or use them.



BONNIE  
MCKENNA

Destined to a life with adventure, Bonnie McKenna took her open water dive in 1955 with no wetsuit or BCD, a J-valve tank, double hose regulator, and fins that weighed a ton. She explored the world, with camera in hand, as an international flight attendant. Now retired, she spends her time working as a photojournalist and conservationist.



JOHN C  
FINE

The author Dr. John Christopher Fine is a marine biologist, Master Scuba Instructor and Instructor Trainer. He is an expert in maritime affairs and has authored 26 published books. His large format coffee table book: TREASURES OF THE SPANISH MAIN contains information and photographs of Spanish colonial shipwrecks.



GENE  
PETERSON

An accomplished wreck explorer, historian, speaker, instructor, and business owner, Gene is a man who wears many hats, and who has made significant strides in surfacing the deep history of New Jersey shipwrecks. Gene has over 40 years of experience in these fields, and we look forward to sharing his stories and expertise in future editions.



MICHAEL  
SALVAREZZA

Michael Salvarezza and Christopher Weaver have been diving the waters of the world since 1978. In that time, they have spent thousands of hours underwater and have accumulated a large and varied library of photographic images. They have presented their work in many multi-media slide presentations, and have appeared previously at Beneath the Sea, the Boston Sea Rovers Underwater Clinic, Ohio ScubaFest and Our World Underwater.

Eco-Photo Explorers (EPE) is a New York based organization and was formed in 1994 to help promote interest in protecting the environment through knowledge and awareness through the use of underwater photography.



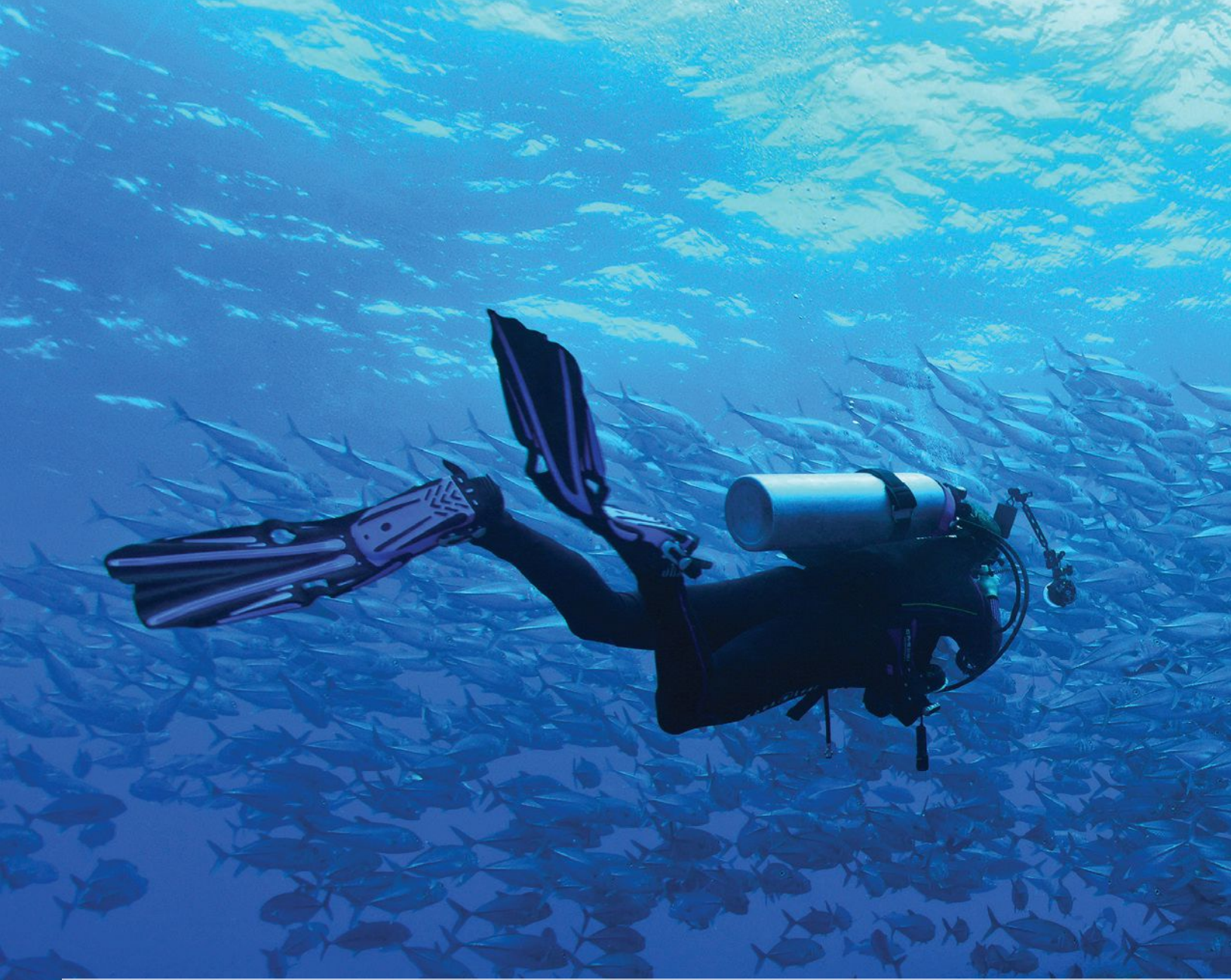
CHRISTOPHER  
WEAVER



MARK  
NORDER

Mark has worked as a diver and dive supervisor for more than 30 years. He works in locations as diverse as Alaska's Bering Sea, the Missouri River and Gulf of Mexico. Mark currently resides in Southern California.





# TUBBATAHA: CORAL KIN

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SALVAREZZA & CHRISTOPHER P. WEAVER, ECO-PHOTO EXPLORERS







# **GDOM OF THE SULU SEA**



The reef was healthy. In fact, exquisitely healthy. Hard and soft corals crowded each other for space while clouds of Anthias in rainbow colors of orange, red, purple and lime-green fluttered a few feet above. Near the top of the dropoff, we had just encountered a dense school of Trevally, swirling in a veritable tornado of fish, and now we were once again drifting at the precipice of the wall below. Our eyes turned to the deep and we began to descend. Whip corals, Gorgonia and massive barrel sponges festooned the wall and at depth the Anthias were replaced with swarms of Pyramid Butterflyfish and Redtooth Triggerfish, all fluttering peacefully in the open water until something big swam by, causing a mass rush to the safe confines of the reef wall.

This was Tubbataha...and something big was often swimming by!

As we drifted deeper our attention was suddenly fixed on a set of white dots just barely visible in the gloom of the deep. We squinted and strained until, gradually, a massive form emerged from the edge of visibility and appeared in all its glory: a whale shark! No, two! No, hang on...is that a third?



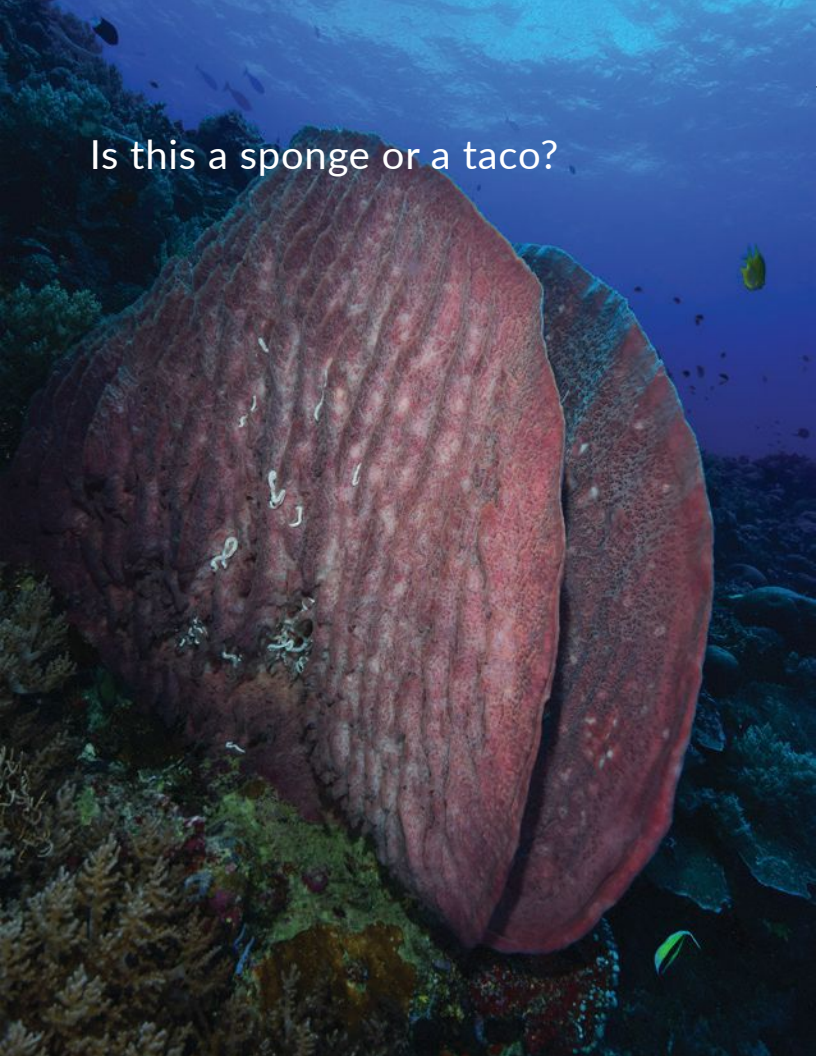
The Discovery Adventure liveaboard

## Introducing Tubbataha

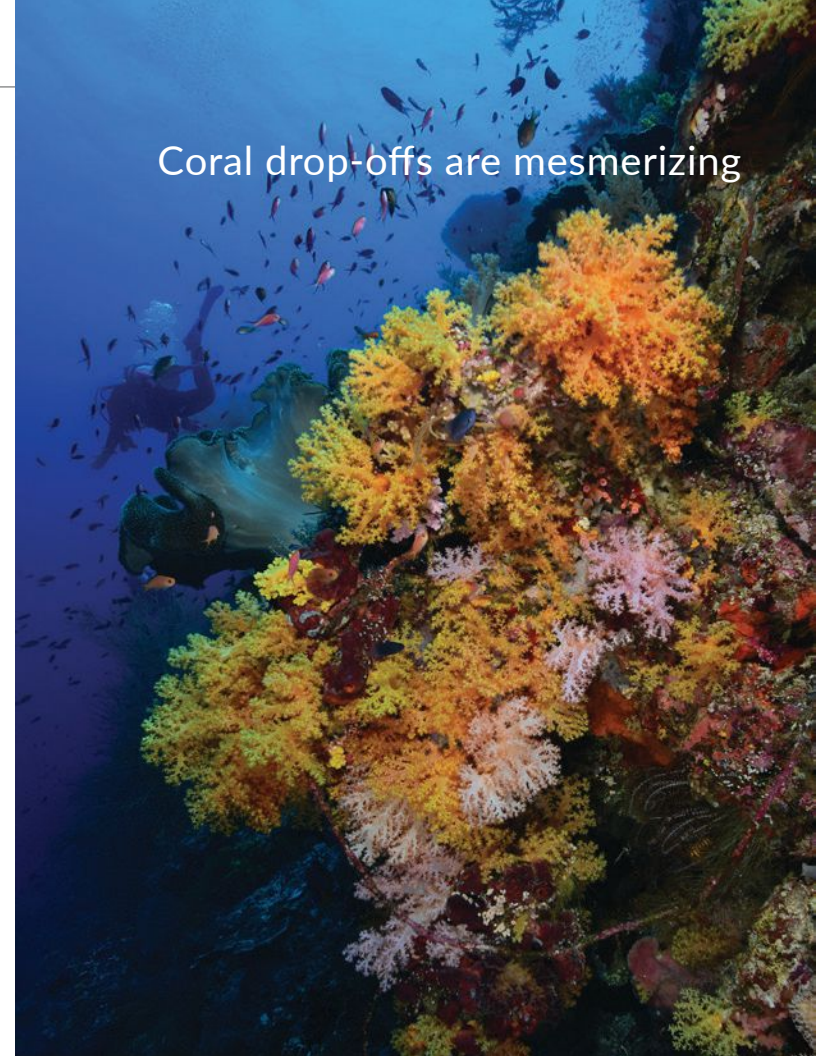
Tubbataha is a collection of three coral atolls that barely reach the surface in a stretch of water in the Sulu Sea, the geographic center of world marine biodiversity. Lying some 93 miles (150km) southeast of Puerto Princesa, in the province of Palawan in the Philippines, Tubbataha Reefs National Park is a 375 square mile (97,030 hectare) Marine Protected Area reachable only by liveaboard dive vessel and only for certain times of the year. Together, the North Atoll, South Atoll and Jessie Beazley Reef that make up Tubbataha are a World Heritage Site and a mecca for SCUBA Divers.

Our journey to Tubbataha was aboard the comfortable **Discovery Adventure liveaboard**, and we were joined by a number of guests of **Marco Vincent Dive Resort** which had chartered the vessel for this end of season transition expedition. The itinerary would first take us to Tubbataha before a visit to a little-known dive site in Cayuan, a stop at Apo Reef and a return to port in Puerto Galera.





Is this a sponge or a taco?



Coral drop-offs are mesmerizing

## Diving Tubbataha

The sighting of three Whale Sharks cruising the wall at a dive site known as **Staghorn Point** on the South Atoll occurred on our first day of diving in Tubbataha. Subsequent dives were equally electric, so much so that we almost became inured to the beautiful reefs and dynamic marine ecosystems that lay before our eyes on each dive. But not quite...

Our expedition began in the South Atoll, with dive sites like **Staghorn Point** where we saw the Whale Sharks and schools of Trevally and Striped Barracuda. We also did several dives at a site known as **Delsan Wreck**. The wreck itself is not part of the dive as it sits in water too shallow for a safe approach. Rather, this site is a sheer wall that drops off from a lush reef teeming with colorful indo-pacific reef fish. On one dive, a group of rather indifferent Bumphead Parrotfish cruised by, pre-occupied with their search for food and unconcerned about the group of divers in their midst.

Schools of Moorish Idols flitted over the reef at **Black Rock** in the northern part of the South Atoll. We also found a variety of Anemones with resident Anemonefish nervously cavorting in the anemone tentacles.

Strong currents are always a possibility at Tubbataha. Most of our dives were drifts with varying degrees of speed. The dive guides are well schooled in the vagaries of the water movement here and we almost never faced a dive into the current nor were we ever confronted with a current too strong for our safety. Still, currents can change in moments, they can be confusingly inconsistent from one depth to another, and down currents are an ever-present danger especially when diving near to the wall. Proper experience will provide greater comfort and proficiency with an SMB is a must.

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On the North Atoll, we dove sites like **South Park, Shark Airport, Seafan Alley** and the ominously named **Washing Machine**. We frequently came across Whitetip Reef Sharks resting in the coral plains, but in the blue water off the walls, we encountered Silvertip Sharks and Silky Sharks on several of the dives.

One of our objectives was to dive with Manta Rays here. We didn't see any but another group on the boat did when they hit the water at the Malayan Wreck. We were skeptical at first, but their video evidence proved us wrong!

Tubbataha is known for its very healthy reefs and big animal action. It is best photographed using wide angle equipment, but divers who thirst for macro experiences can delight in the intricate reef systems which hold so much small life to be photographed. Just be aware that as you focus on the small stuff, big animals will undoubtedly be swimming by!



Clown Triggerfish are easily spotted on the reef

### Protecting Tubbataha

The name "Tubbataha" comes from the Samal language meaning "long reef exposed at low tide". Positioned in the middle of the Sulu Sea and very far from inhabitable land, the isolation of this reef system was, for many years, its best protection. There are only a few very tiny islets poking ever so slightly above the waves, and there is no protection from typhoons associated with the northeast monsoon between November and March and the southwest monsoon between July and October. Still, increasing numbers of Filipino fisherman using motorized boats in the 1980s began to threaten the health of the reefs. Dynamite and cyanide fishing began in earnest as the abundance of fish here became well known.

Thankfully, in 1988 President Corazon Aquino declared Tubbataha a National Marine Park, the first of its kind in the Philippines. A model for conservation and protection was implemented and has gradually been improved over the years. This model, which includes restricted access, ample time for no visitation, aggressive enforcement of regulations and very strict requirements of all visitors, including divers, is one that has shown success and should be emulated the world over.

Divers are among the most frequent visitors and their actions are very carefully monitored. Indeed, dive guides can be heavily fined or even prohibited from working in the park if the divers they escort do as much as touch the coral or harass any of the marine life. For divers, this is a very strict "no touch" environment and good

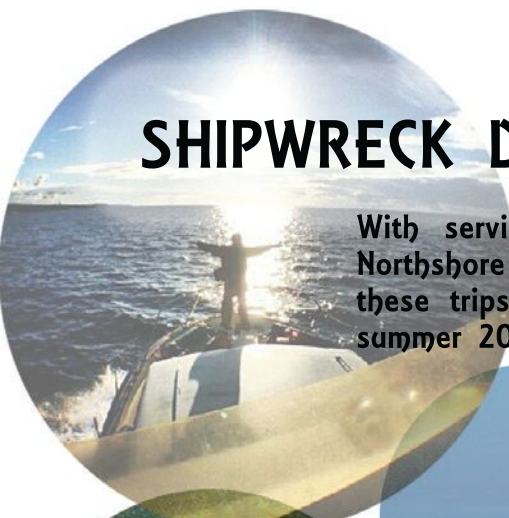




An oddly shaped sponge

## SHIPWRECK DIVING AT IT'S BEST

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buoyancy skills are essential.

Our journey included a visit to the ranger station on the North Atoll, where we briefly glimpsed what life is like for the dedicated individuals working here to protect Tubbataha. Here, a team of between 10-12 men from the Philippine Navy, Philippine Coast Guard, Municipality of Cagayancillo and the Tubbataha Management Office are stationed here in a shelter for 2 months at a time with the task of protecting the park from illegal activities. Equipped with radar, motor boats and other equipment, they regularly patrol the park and confront unauthorized visitors.

It is a vitally important role.

While we were there, we met with Angelique Songco, referred to affectionately by those she works with as "Mama Ranger". She has been Tubbataha's Park Manager since 2001 and she works tirelessly to protect this very special place. We thanked her, and the rangers, for the work they are doing and for the hardships they endure on behalf of the reef. The work has paid off...Tubbataha has some of the healthiest reefs in the world.



Whale Sharks are seen cruising along the walls



## Leaving Tubbataha

The Discovery Adventure left Tubbataha in the early evening as the sun set behind a flat horizon on a sultry afternoon. We were bound for a rare dive at Cayuan, 15 hours away, where we would be among the first 200 people to ever dive this pinnacle in the Sulu Sea, and for a visit to Apo Reef before ending our journey with some fascinating muck dives in Puerto Galera.

But the sensational reefs of Tubbataha had gotten into our blood.

As seabirds called, we bid adieu to the reefs and all the myriad creatures making this their home. This expedition was the final one of the season. In the coming weeks, the waters will turn rough and storms may rake over Tubbataha with unrelenting fury. But for us, the knowledge that this area of ocean will now remain undisturbed for 9 months makes us smile. It is a chance for Tubbataha to breath, to regenerate, to exist as the reefs of the world once did: healthy, in balance and teeming with life.

## Getting There

The only way to dive Tubbataha is via liveaboard, and most depart from the port city of Puerto Princesa on the island of Palawan. Philippines Air Express flies domestic routes from Manila Airport.

## Diving and Accommodation

Mike and Chris dove with the Discovery Adventure Liveaboard, on a chartered expedition by Marco Vincent Dive Resort. This was a 14-day custom itinerary that cost \$4800 per person and was all inclusive, including domestic airfare from Manila. Contact Marco Vincent Dive Resort for more information: <http://www.marcovincent.com>

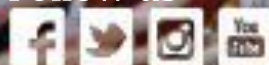
## When to go

The dive season at Tubbataha runs from March through June only.

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