

before a grueling trip home. It was more than an imposition, and dangerous. At night, we were ferried to Wakatobi for a barbecue. The food was passable, drinks were expensive at U.S. \$9 apiece, and it was too crowded, although the divers there seemed happy enough.

The Pelagian spreads a five-day itinerary across 10 days. If you go, consider the seven-day trip instead, and insist that your itinerary favor muck diving over walls and reefs. It's too long a way to come for mediocre diving.

-- D.L.



**Diver's Compass:** For my 11-day trip, I spent \$3,650 for a deluxe cabin; it's \$3,080 for a standard cabin and \$4,050 for the master suite . . . For the seven-night cruise, a standard cabin is \$2,180 . . . I flew with American and Japan Airlines, connecting though Tokyo then Denpasar . . . There's a recompression chamber in Denpasar near the airport . . . It's not considered a malaria hotspot but a series of Malarone can't hurt; I experienced no side effects . . . Since the Bali bombings, there are strict security procedures at airports and hotels, but I felt no threats to my safety . . . Web site:

<http://pelagian.wakatobi.com>.

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## Is the Travel Info You Need Online?

*some dive resorts don't list all your costs on their Web sites*

The Internet is a great place for finding information about dive resorts, but you need to dig for the details. Even though remote resorts have Web sites promoting their services, not all have full and accurate information, especially about extra fees and charges. And even if you're booking through a travel agency, don't expect it to have all the details, especially if the resort is a small, obscure place it has never worked with. More than ever, it's up to you to get the answers.

Case in point: *Undercurrent* reader Don Beukers (San Jose, CA) booked his last dive trip through Reef & Rainforest dive travel agency for what he thought would be a pretty inclusive week at the Matana Beach Resort on Kadavu. He got a shock at checkout time. "I had paid for five days of diving, but it turned out I had only paid for five two-tank dives and was charged US\$660 for the additional dives." A waterfall trip he thought was inclusive was \$40 per person, plus tax. "A bar bill for a bottle of wine, beers and a couple of margaritas added an additional US\$430." As at most resorts, there was no market nearby to buy beer or wine. "I wish that all the information was upfront to eliminate the surprise."

Matana Resort's director Cameron Forster puts the blame on Reef & Rainforest, saying it's clearly stated that dive packages are sold in lots of two tanks per day. "Our agents usually tell guests they can pay for any extra diving when they are at the resort." For the special Manta Excursion, guests are told they can swap two of their pre-paid days or pay \$280 Fijian for the full-day excursion. "Dive forms are given to all divers on arrival with diving

costs described, which must be signed and returned before diving starts," says Forster. He also says agents should tell guests they'll need to pay for drinks, which is why both bars have a price list placed on every countertop. "We did everything to state these costs upfront. Travel agents should understand we're a dive resort on a remote island and advise their clients accordingly."

Not so fast, says Beukers. Matana didn't make those charges clear enough to him while he was there. "Reef & Rainforest gave us a good explanation of the costs involved, however, I don't think they knew of the 'extras' and as such, did not advise us of them. I don't like the way Matana led us into situations where 'extras' are needed without a full explanation."

Reef & Rainforest's Jenny Collister, who booked Beukers' trip, says Matana did not provide her with all the details. She had told Beukers about the two-tank days but did not know about the dive trips costing extra. "We give clients the information we are given, and we also give them the resort's Web site address to get more details."

However, Matana does not give many details on its Web site. Its "Rates" page is sparse, listing prices only for two-tank morning excursions but not stating how much extra dives cost. A separate page for the "Manta Encounter" gives a brief description of the three-tank, all-day dive but no price. The Fact Sheet page is "coming soon." That's the same information Collister had on hand when she booked

## Got a Medical Emergency? Call DAN Again and Again

Most divers know if they have a medical emergency on a dive trip, the first call should be to Divers' Alert Network. But one phone call may not suffice, especially in a remote area. You may have to call DAN multiple times to get help.

This point is illustrated in a letter from *Undercurrent* reader Judith Paulding (Port Washington, NY). She was finishing the first dive of her Bahamas trip with Blackbeard's Cruises in late April when a male passenger suddenly collapsed. The crew called DAN and was told that transport to a chamber was needed. They ran the boat to Bimini and placed the man in the local clinic, but he was convulsing and going in and out of consciousness.

"We were told LifeNet would transfer, but then we were told it had to transport another diver first," says Paulding. The crew called the U.S. Coast Guard in Miami, but they declined to get involved. "We were tied up at the dock at Bimini all day, but it took eight hours to get transport, and this is in an area with a lot of dive boats."

DAN went through the proper procedures, says Joel Dovenbarger, vice-president of medical services. "Our medical department received one call from a person who was at the scene. We got a history of the case and agreed with their plan to take the patient to the clinic, and call the Coast Guard to evacuate the diver to the hospital. We asked that they call us back if there were problems."

Following its protocol, DAN arranged for the diver to be accepted at the hospital and spoke with its attending

hyperbaric physician. "I'm unsure who called for the commercial evacuation, but DAN was never contacted again," says Dovenbarger. He checked with DAN TravelAssist, but it had no record of the case because it didn't manage the evacuation. "Then I spoke with LifeNet and they couldn't tell me who ordered the evacuation or any problems associated with it. When we are involved in a case and ask for an air evacuation, it is billed directly to DAN TravelAssist, but LifeNet had no information on that so it sent the bill directly to the diver."

Dovenbarger talked to the diver's wife, who also didn't know who called LifeNet but believed most of the communication was via radio. "We could have moved faster but we were not involved except for a single phone call. No one called to ask for additional assistance once it became clear things weren't going to work out."

Lesson learned: DAN members shouldn't hesitate to call if things aren't moving fast enough, and they should make sure the air ambulance and hospital are also speaking to DAN. In this situation, one call was not enough because details may have been overblown or underemphasized as more parties got involved. That diver recovered but in the case of many diver maladies, particularly decompression sickness, any delay can complicate problems severely. Don't hesitate to keep pushing. DAN should be your main contact, and it doesn't mind multiple calls – three people are always on call for medical emergencies, and DAN TravelAssist also offers 24-hour service call coverage.

Matana. She says Reef & Rainforest doesn't recommend Matana to divers that much, mostly because it is miles away from the popular Astrolab Reef – probably why they charge extra to dive it. "If they don't list the extras on the Web site, then we can't be aware of them."

According to Colleen Gleason, owner of dive travel agency Sand Dollar Tours in Fort Collins, CO, 90 percent of dive resorts don't list extra charges on their Web sites. "The more they are off the beaten path, the less information they list."

*Undercurrent* did a random search of dive resorts around the Internet and found a mixed bag. Some resorts are very detailed. Buddy Dive Resort in Bonaire plasters prices all over its Web site ([www.buddydive.com](http://www.buddydive.com)) for dive packages, gear rental, room rates, breakfasts and a la carte diving. Even though it's remote, Sorido Bay Resort in Raja Ampat is very clear on its Web site ([www.iriandiving.com](http://www.iriandiving.com)), with its "Rates" page listing what is included in a package, what costs extra and the prices for both. Some well-known resorts' Web sites are surprisingly obscure about some or all of their costs.

Ramon's Village on San Pedro Island, Belize, doesn't list prices

for anything. Turneffe Island Lodge, also in Belize, does a good job of breaking down the rates for various multi-night packages during high, low and mid-season, but it doesn't describe what is and isn't included in its Fishing, Diving, Beachcomber and Combo packages. It offers no prices for gear rentals or a la carte diving. They mention trips to the Blue Hole, but it's doubtful that is one of the five included dives in a three-night package.

Chances are the "Rates" page you see is the same one travel agents look at before sending clients on trips there. "Some resorts we deal with all the time so they send us all the information, but for other sites, we either find it out from their Web sites or just from client feedback," says Collister.

Lesson learned: It's up to you to take responsibility for getting the information. You can't rely on your travel agent to do all the work anymore. Agencies' commissions are now under 10 percent of a trip's total, so at best they gross \$300 from your \$3,000 Fiji trip. That will probably get you an hour's worth of a travel agent's time, so don't expect them to handle a lot of detailed requests. And if you're not book-

ing your airfare through an agency, which provides much of the commission, it won't pull out the extra stops for you. If it doesn't know the resort well, it probably can't anyway. "We can't spend hours digging around on the Web site to search for the extras," Collister says. "It's up to the resort to let us know extra charges so we can tell clients and put it on their vouchers. That, or put it on their Web sites so it is very clear."

In the Internet age, even dive resorts should know that they need to be more transparent with their pricing. However, there may still be some cost-related issues that you will only discover once you get there - like how many divers going to Saba don't know that its marine park fee is charged per dive instead of per day. If you want a good deal on a dive resort, book through a travel agency specializing in dive travel packages - *Undercurrent* gives a list of good ones in the annual

*Chapbook*. If you want to travel easy without any price shockers, pick resorts well represented by these agencies so that you can get the lowdown on all extra costs (such as the fact that Roatan's Fantasy Island Resort "free drinks" only covers coffee and tea but not juice, soft drinks or alcohol).

If you do want to try a new resort, the good news is you have a direct line even to the most remote one. Send an e-mail asking for what's included in a package, what is not, and how much those extras cost. Resorts probably aren't withholding information intentionally, they may just not realize their Web pages lack details. In your e-mail, include a request for them to list all their rates and extra charges on their website. You'll be helping them become more professional, and you'll be doing a big favor for other divers planning their next trip.

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## Eliminating Underwater Terrorists

*excruciating sound will drive them from the water*

September 11 boosted terror alerts everywhere, including underwater. Now, the FBI is asking the nation's scuba instructors to watch for potential terrorist threats. Its Joint Terrorism Task Force recently alerted dive shops around the country to look out for divers seeking advanced training, including diving in murky water and in sewer pipes. The FBI said the advisory is routine and was not prompted by any threat, but it did ask instructors to be aware of "odd inquiries" inconsistent with recreational diving, such as advanced navigation techniques, deep diving and using underwater vehicles.

You may picture the image of hooded divers with spearguns chasing each other around underwater on self-propelled vehicles, like James Bond in *Thunderball*. But just as Agent 007 was fictional, so is that scenario. Capturing and killing divers by hand only happens in the movies.

***The most promising non-lethal diver weapon is a low-frequency sound.***

With hundreds of thousands of certified divers out in the water, how can the military differentiate between those intent on carrying out terrorist attacks and those who just innocently stumble into restricted areas? And do they refrain from injuring, even killing, unsuspecting divers unintentionally? The good news is armed forces are developing remarkable non-lethal weapons that separate the good from the bad.

Passive sonar is used to listen for sounds like propellers, motors and marine mammals, but divers are harder to track. Those using open-circuit scuba gear produce periodic noise that can be detected and classified, but divers using rebreathers don't produce the same amounts of noise and so are extremely difficult to locate on a sonar screen.

According to a 2002 report commissioned by the Navy's Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center in San Diego, the most promising long-term solution for a non-lethal diver threat weapon is a low-frequency sound in the 20 to 100 megahertz range. That would be just enough to cause a lot of discomfort to divers' ears and lungs but no physical damage. The report's recommendation was "spark gap sound sources" that store electric charge in a large, high-voltage bank of conductors, then release all the stored energy in an arc across electrodes in the water. This spark discharge creates a high-pressure plasma and vapor bubble in the water that expands and then collapses, making a loud sound similar to those from air guns and underwater explosions.

According to a *New Scientist* article, the U.S. Navy's Anti-Terrorism Afloat program is developing and testing a spark-gap system to deploy from patrol boats or control remotely from the sea floor. Ideally, the device will emit an audible, low-powered warning when an intruder is sighted to make him surface, but also create more severe effects if an intruder persists. But it won't be lethal. This is partly because of the risk of accidentally targeting innocent divers, but also "because you can learn much more from people if they are alive," Tom LaPuzza, a spokesperson for the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center, told *New Scientist*.