

French Polynesia

Part 1: High Islands

by Jean Michel Machefert

This year we decided to visit a dream place we'd never been before: French Polynesia.

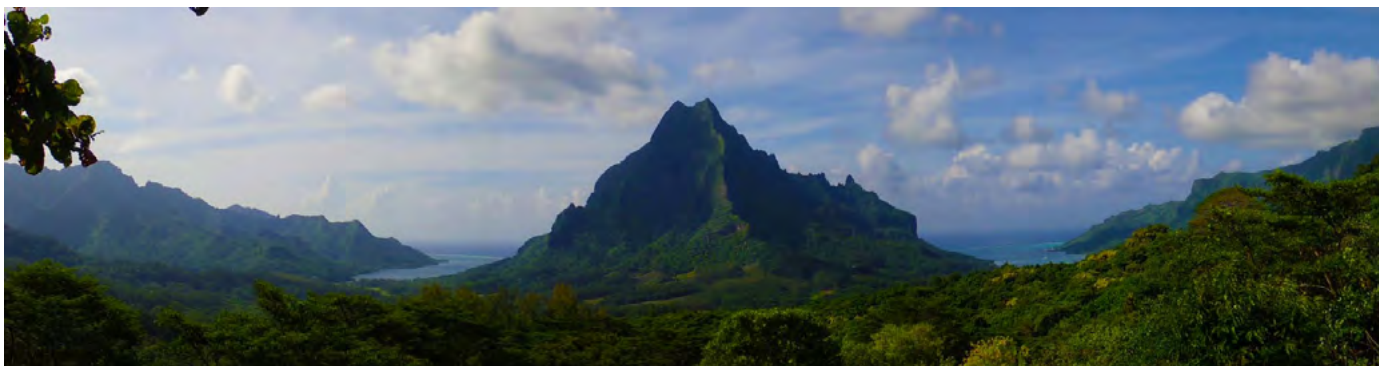
This location is far from Europe but quite convenient to reach. The international airport of Faa'a close to Papeete on the island of Tahiti has direct flights to Los Angeles (8h flight) and also to Auckland or Hawaii and even to Japan. Then from Faa'a local planes comfortably dispatch the travellers to all the most important islands of the French Polynesia.

French Polynesia is a group of 118 islands and many more islets located almost in the middle-south of the pacific. These islands are constituting 6 archipelagos: Marquesas Islands, Society islands, Tuamotu Archipelago, Gambier Islands, Austral islands and bass islands.

All these islands are scattered over more than 2000 kilometers (almost the same surface as Europe) and from a geological point of view they can be separated in high islands (islands with a mountain) and low islands (also named atolls) looking like a ring at a very low altitude.

Before going underwater let me explain some important geological phenomenon with some importance for divers.

The archipelagos of Polynesia are created on hot spots under the tectonic plate of the pacific. The hot spots could be considered as spring of liquid magma and at their location the earth crust is



Panoramic view of the bays on the north coast of Moorea from the Beledere. Olympus tg5 (mode Panorama), 7.86mm, 1/200, f11 ISO 100

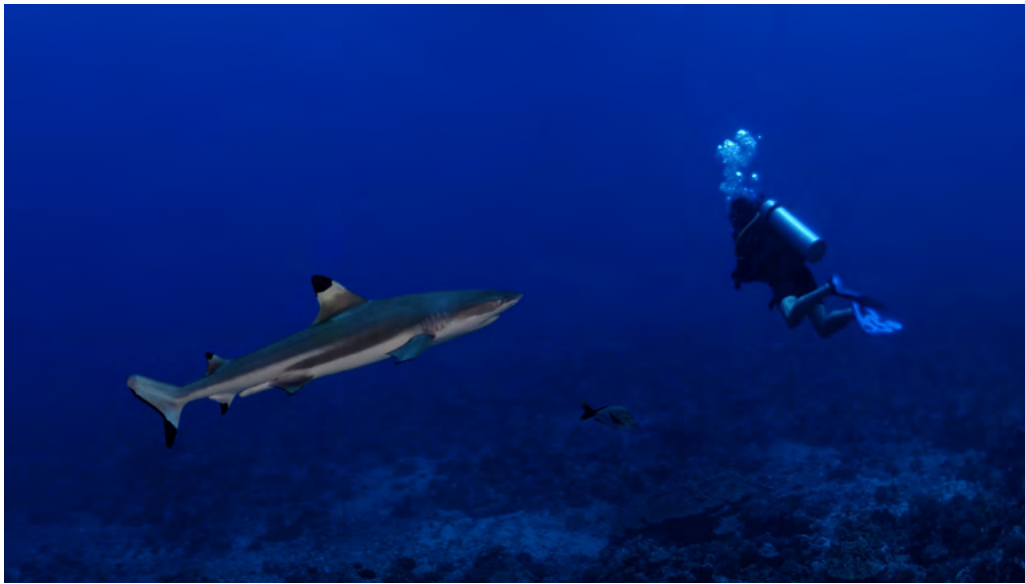


Black tip on the reef barrier in Moorea. Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/125, f10, ISO 200, 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

pierced by the magma creating a volcano growing to build an island as soon as it develops over the surface of the sea.

The pacific plate moves to the North West

over the hot spot staying at the same place with an interrupted activity. Then a new volcano (island) is created at each sequence of eruption. When the plate moves away from the hot spot it cools with an



Black tip shark looking at a diver on the reef barrier in Moorea. Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 125, f 10 , ISO 200 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

Trigger fish over a boulder of hard coral in Moorea . Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 125, f 10 , ISO 200 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

increasing density and also under the weight of the volcano the bottom of the island goes deeper and deeper.

As a consequence with such phenomenon and with the erosion of the original volcanoes the older islands have a lower altitude and are more flat than the younger.

Indeed these geological phenomenon is very important for the diver. We are in tropical water and the coral needing sun and warm water grows in shallow depth at the edge of the volcano and continues to grow

vertically toward the surface when the volcano goes deeper.

At the beginning the coral built a reef around the volcano and after several millions of years the volcano is eroded and its bottom is deep enough to be fully covered by water but the coral is still there at the surface creating a big ring around the former volcano. Inside this ring this is the lagoon with shallow water. Now it's time to dive.

Since we arrive in Tahiti we decide to go by ferry (30 minutes) to





Red fish on the reef in Moorea . Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Sigma 17-70mm at 26mm, 1/ 60, f11 , ISO 200 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

the high island of Moorea at 17 km from our landing place. Moorea is for sure the most convenient location for some rest and the first dives after 21 h of flight (from France) even if there are some diving spots in Tahiti near Papeete.

Moorea was formed as a volcano about 2 million years ago. Now Moorea is a high island with an altitude of 1207m over the sea at the mount Tohi ea (the total height to consider is close to 3000m since the sea bed close to the shore line is near 1500m under the surface) and a

barrier reef goes almost completely around the island with a small lagoon between the volcano and the barrier.

With such barrier reef only 20 minutes of boat in the lagoon along the overwater bungalows built by international hotels are required for going to the place of the first dive close to the outer side of the barrier. The spot is almost 20m deep without too much current. Perfect for a first dive!

As soon as the boat stops a couple of black tip sharks are still waiting for us. We enter into the



Turtle in the middle of hard coral bushes in Moorea . Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 125, f 10 , ISO 200 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

sea followed by our sharks looking indifferent and staying at a reasonable distance (too far for my wide angle!).

The bottom is covered by many varieties of hard corals either forming bushes or small plates looking more or less as petals of roses.

Each bush shelters a big number of small fishes (anthias, damselfishes, chromis...) going back deeper between the boughs of coral as soon as they detect a move of water. At some locations clown fishes do their job consisting in defending their anemone against every kind of

predator and also from photographers. On the bottom in the middle of the corals some turtles are also used to stay and eat very well camouflaged. Some others are deeply entering into the cracks of the reef for resting without any risk of shark attacks.

Of course during all the dives the black tip sharks are not really far but always friendly and by chance for the photographer time to time they turn closer around the divers giving us the chance of nice pictures.

Between the areas covered by corals there are some patches of sand



Clown fish on the reef in Moorea . Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 100, f 13 , ISO 200 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

on which this is possible to see some white tip sharks lying on the sand always at locations with a discernible flow of water.

In Moorea there are other fishes more aggressive than black tip sharks: triggerfishes! as soon as you are over them they feel attacked and they rush on you with open mouth ready to bite and they do until you go under them.

They also are not very honest between them. The triggerfishes like to eat starfishes and in Polynesia starfishes are sometimes hidden deeply into the coral bushes and some small triggerfishes succeed time to time to extract them. But if a bigger triggerfish stay in the surrounding area he will wait until the end of the extracting process by the smaller and rush on him right after for stealing him the starfish.

All the dives and diving clubs are located on the north coast of Moorea and one of the particularity of Moorea is that lemon sharks can



2 Black tip sharks on the reef barrier in Moorea. Nikon D2x, housing Aquatica, Nikkor 10.5mm, 1/ 125, f 10 , ISO 200 , 2 strobes nikon Sb 910, Patima housings, 1/2 and 1/4 power

be observed close to the reef barrier and that they come close to the divers with more curiosity than aggressiveness. This is one of the few locations in the world with such behaviour of lemon sharks. Why? Because of a former touristic village.

In this famous “all inclusive” holidays organisation a big quantity of food was scrapped every day, and the best way to scrap it was at that time to throw it in front of the pass close to the village. Rapidly sharks were interested by the food and even species not frequently seen close to the shore as lemon sharks. The scrapping practice stopped suddenly when some tiger sharks took the habit to swim between the tourists at few meters of the private beach of the village... Now this village is closed (since 2001) and the shark feeding is regulated (shark feeding is only authorized outside

of the barrier at a minimum distance of 1km from a pass).

Nevertheless lemon sharks continue to be friendly (at a reasonable distance if you do not feed them) and close to the shore in Moorea. They are much shinier on the other islands of Polynesia.

One more comment on the dives in Moorea. All the pictures shown in this article were taken on this north coast of the island without feeding nor disturbing the animals and the environment (at least as much as a photographer not disturb the environment). For sure by looking carefully in books or on the web this is easy to find many much more attractive pictures of Moorea with plenty of lagoon sharks, sting rays... coming almost in contact with the front lens of the camera. Such pictures (most of the time split shots with an islet

at the background of the lagoon) are taken on the south east coast of Moorea either at 11h30am or 2pm in a sea park where the species are fed by guides.

So to conclude this first part of the trip in Polynesia, Moorea is a perfect place for diving right after the long flight required for arriving in Polynesia. The water is crystal clear, the diving spots are close to the shore, not too deep, and now the sharks and all other species are easy to see and to photograph. For the macro photographer there are also a lot of tiny life inside the coral reef for never ending dives...

But Polynesia is also the place of low islands named atolls with pass acting as concentrators for fauna creating then unique places for divers and photographers. Among all the islands of Polynesia, the archipelago of the Tuamotu with 76 atolls is really the place to go for discovering the flat islands of Polynesia, and sceneries completely different from what we have seen in Moorea.

This will be In the next issue of UWP magazine where we will show some pictures of the famous

pass of Rangiroa with hundreds of sharks living just in front of it. We will also show the reef and the pass of the atoll of Tikehau close to Rangiroa and known to be (as J Y Cousteau said) the atoll with the richest marine life in the south pacific.

Jean Michel Machefert

Jean Michel began to dive in caves, lakes and the oceans in 1987. He started underwater photography in 1992 using a Nikonos IV. After shooting many years with a Nikon D70 he now uses a Nikon D2x in an Aquatica housing with 2 Nikon SB910 strobes in Patima housing.

www.jmfrog.com



Issue 108/76



Since 1985, Raie Manta Club offers the best dives in Rangiroa (French Polynesia). Enjoy close encounters with the 'very bigs'. Special care for photographers and rebreathers



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Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards,

Subjects -, Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 150dpi

Size - Maximum length 20cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 20 cm wide and verticals would be 20cm high.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

3. Captions - **Each and every image MUST have full photographic details** including camera, housing, lens, lighting, film, aperture, shutter speed and exposure mode. These must also be copied and pasted into the body of the e mail.

Parting Shot 1

So, there I was, nearing the end of my dive and my trip, hanging over the deck of the Fujikawa Maru, one of the most famous ship wrecks in all of Truk Lagoon - if not the world. Looking down to the sandy bottom around 90ft I saw a large marbled stingray sifting through the sand having a late afternoon snack. I had the perfect lens on my Nikon D2x, my 12-24mm zoom, wrapped in my Subal housing with the 9in dome port.

Looking at my gauges, I had enough air, but not enough bottom time without going into deco. Being this was our last day of diving, I felt confident in my abilities to safely go into deco without a problem, and this opportunity only comes along only once in a lifetime I did what any avid underwater photographer would do - over the side and down to the sandy bottom I went.

Creeping up slowly on this beautiful stingray, I began taking pictures as I started to close in, only to realize that one of my two flashes was out of power. No worries, being that I was working with my Ikelite SS200s, I knew one would be more than enough to light the subject if positioned correctly. So, I carefully and slowly repositioned my flash so

as not to spook my new best buddy and kept creeping up until I was close enough that she/he filled my viewfinder. After a few more pics I took a look at my Suunto wrist computer and was shocked to see, again plenty of air, but how deep I was in deco - my Suunto required a mandatory 20+ minute deco stop. A few more pictures and off I go on a very slow ascent for a very long deco stop.

The good thing about the Fujikawa Maru is that a deco stop isn't like most, where you are hanging in mid water under the dive boat counting down the minutes. At the Fujikawa Maru you can explore the tops of two king posts that lie between 15-20ft below the surface. So, as I drained my tank down to a couple hundred pounds of air paying my fine to the nitrogen police I was able to explore the life encrusted king posts and recount the great 10 day trip my friends and I had exploring Truk Lagoon from our home base on the Odyssey.

Being that the marbled Stingray isn't a particularly colorful critter,



Nikon D2x, 12-24mm Nikon D, Subal Housing, Ikelite SS200. ISO 100, f9, 1/100 sec

I thought it best to convert this to grayscale and a 12"x18" print happily hangs on my wall reminding me of my adventure.

Doug Wakeman



**Do you have a shot which has a story within a story?
If so e mail it with up to 500 words of text
and yours could be the next Parting Shot.**

peter@uwpmag.com

Parting Shot 2

I take a camera every time I am in the water not so much because I enjoy taking pictures. It is more for my students who love seeing themselves diving and being able to share their experience.

I am a freediving Instructor from Greece but for the last years I spend a lot of time in Indonesia where people can not have enough of Freediving. Schools in north of Bali are multiplying and are busier than ever. After working the high season (May-Oct) in Amed and spending my days in Jemeluk bay and Tulamben, this off season, I found myself in Jakarta where most of the training takes place in pools. The freediving community here books a 5m pool for courses or training and in the end of the day it is “picture time”. One of the things that I found out working in this part of the world is that people here take their pictures and social media a lot more seriously than back in Europe. The tradition of “picture time” is very important for them. I am starting to think that they suffer me and the training only for the pictures in the end.

“Picture time” always starts with the group picture which is never a success in terms of coordination or posing but it is always fun.



*Canon EOS 550D, Sea & Sea RDX-550D housing, Tokina Lens Fisheye 10-17 F3.5-4.5 DX
11mm 1/60s @f/5.0 ISO 800 -1 stop P mode*

Nicholas Kouvaras
www.freedivingsociety.com

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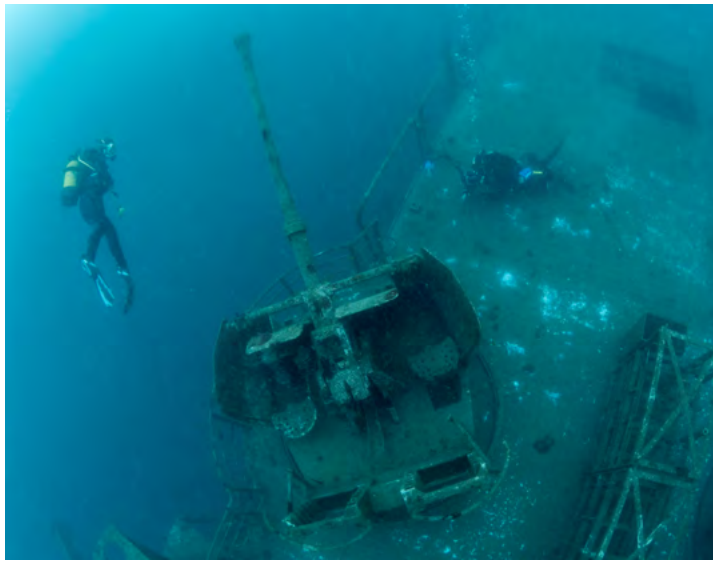
peter@uwpmag.com
If so, yours could be in UwP109

Parting Shot 3

Following the sinking of an ex-Portuguese Navy corvette in Porto Santo, Madeira's archipelago, in 2016 (UWP-92), a new corvette was sunk this time in the Madeira Island. This will be the first of a new group of three ex-Portuguese Navy ships, that were made available by the Portuguese Navy to be sunk in the mentioned archipelago.

This ship, the Afonso Cerqueira, was sunk on the south coast of Madeira, near the famous Cabo Girão, and will be followed by another corvette (84 meters long), and a smaller patrol boat (44 meters long) hopefully until the end of 2020, and all on the south coast of the island.

The Cerqueira was sunk last September, by the Portuguese Navy team that had already sunk the previous one, and sits on a sandy bottom of 30 meters, making it available for almost all divers. All possible materials pollution materials were, as usual removed. All the inside was prepared for the safety of the divers, with open spaces (sometimes to big that decharacterized a bit the inside). This time not only the propellers were sunk with the ship, but also the three guns, giving the photographer's more interesting themes to shoot.

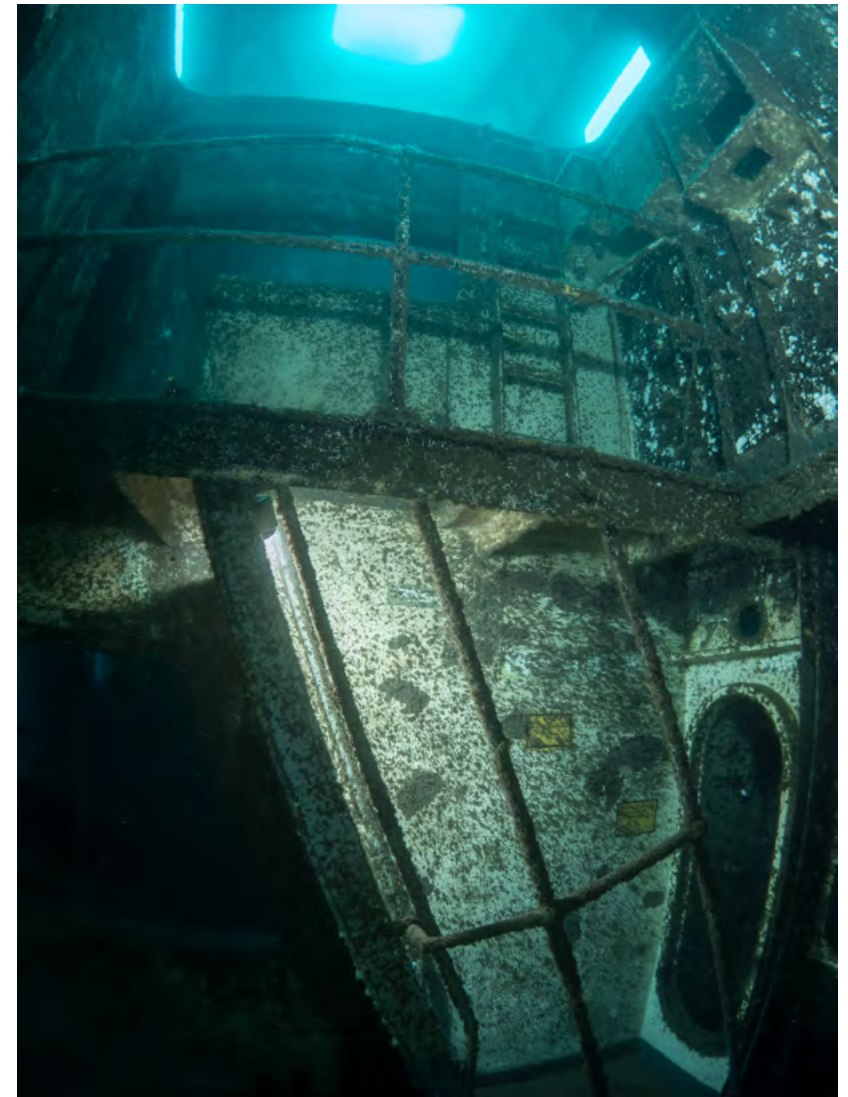


Although in the summer the water in the area is mostly crystal clear, on my dive this early Abril it wasn't. Some heavy rains had fallen, plus some unusual wind brought sediments to the area, reducing the visibility.

Life is starting to attach to the wreck, mainly smaller fishes and, at least, two octopus. The very thin volcanic sand is also getting inside the wreck, so divers have to be careful not to disturb it, or it will ruin photographer's life...

Unfortunately, no dive centers in the nearest town, so divers will take, at least a 25 to 45 minutes ride from the existing dive centers. One wonders why the first one was sunk in this place...

Olympus M1 Mk2, Nauticam housing, Olympus 8 mm, f/8, 1/40, Zen dome, 2 Inon Z240 strobes plus another Inon Z240, on slave mode inside the wreck, camera settings - f/5.6, 1/20



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peter@uwpmag.com

Augusto Salgado

Yours could be in UwP109

Parting Shot 4

Recently I decided to make the trip from Greece to Sudan for a livaboard trip onboard M/Y Andromeda, with intention to do the Sudan ultimate route which include some of the best dive sites in Sudan like S.S Umbria wreck, Shaab Rumi, Sharan Annat South and many more.

I must say here that I am diving for ten years and the last two years I started trying underwater photography with DSLR and I love wide angle photography so I thought Sudan will be perfect for practice. Sudan is perfect for that, it has beautiful wrecks, lots of sharks, big groups of pelagic and pristine reefs. The dives are usually deep and with current so we can track the big pelagic species.

Although the first day was great with very good weather and the dives were relaxing and easy, the next three days were windy with rough sea, strong current and bad visibility, something that didn't help me a lot considering that I am new in underwater photography. And unfortunately it was the days that we were in the places that were best to see pelagic species, sharks (reef sharks, hammerheads, silky etc.) we encountered for example a big group of hammerheads but it was deep and my nitrox didn't allow me to get close

to them! In another case we saw two big adult grey reef sharks but the visibility was really bad! The fourth day the weather was a bit better, we saw a lot of big groups of barracudas, sea turtles, and many other interesting and fascinating stuff and I made some photos that I was happy with, but I was disappointed because I didn't have any good shark photo that I will be happy with, at the moment I didn't know the present mother nature had for me!

Fifth day during our first dive and at the time of our safety stop, I was relaxing and put away my camera, I saw from distance a familiar silhouette approaching us! A shark, a baby girl! She came straight to me, I barely had time to prepare my camera and although I burn a lot of good poses due to camera settings, I managed to calm (I was extremely excited) adjust the settings and make this photo! The little baby girls stayed with us for about ten minutes approaching and investigating everyone in our team!

The next days we had some really nice reef dives and one of the best wreck dives in the Red Sea the S.S Umbria. The overall trip and dive experience of my trip to Sudan was great it is a must dive destination! And I must say a big thanks to our



Camera Canon 7D MkII, Canon 17-40, ikelite housing and 2 DS 161 flash set to minimum, ISO 160, F stop 7.1, Exp. 1/160 sec, shutter priority.

dive guide Sapry (I hope the spelling is correct if not Sorry my friend) that he was very good in pointing us the best life in the dives and trying always our group to be the first on the dive sites (a big must for example if you dive S.S Umbria and there are four more livaboard around and you like to make good photos) and keeping us safe!

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