

Seychelles and the mermaid

by Michel Braunstein

Seychelles is a small and charming archipelago of 115 islands between the tropics in Southeast Africa. With a population of 90.000 inhabitants, the archipelago extends over 1.37 million sq km. Plastic bags are forbidden, and every material is recycled. While the country has an army, it has no enemies. Tourism is Its main industry. Its amazing 65 million years granite formations make it quite a unique place. The country looks like a paradise and worth the visit.

Our adventure began, about a week before our departure. There was an opportunity to fly to Seychelles, so that we got organized quickly.

This was the first time I was travelling since the beginning of the pandemic, a different experience than before. We had to undergo a PCR COVID19 test 72 hours prior to our departure and upload the results to the Seychelles tourism website.

When departing, the airport was rather empty. Oddly enough, the slow queue made me think that there may be many people in front of our group. Of course, the mask was mandatory everywhere in the airport, including during the flight.

We had all heard the not-so-great

diving stories in the Seychelles, so we didn't know exactly what to expect but we were positively surprised.

We joined the Big Blue Divers, a PADI 5 stars dive centre. Liz, the owner, is an elegant and sportive blond woman originally from the Netherlands; she was our dive guide. I am always flabbergasted to see how professional divers with thousands of dives in the area, still show the same enthusiasm during each dive, constantly filming and photographing. That's exactly what Liz is all about; she lives it, it's her passion. So, our first meeting with her was the perfect start to our diving days.

Liz made her best to bring us to the best spots. We got there without expectations, so, from there, we could only go up.

Due to global warming, coral bleaching causes the reef to die in

One of the Big Blue Divers dive boats on its way to a dive spot. Nikon D500, F22 1/200 ISO250

Biter Rock's colorful reefs. Nikon D850 + 15mm fisheye in Nauticam housing + 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes. F8 1/125 ISO200





***Our mermaid Mor free-diving to meet us at 30m depth
Nikon D850 + 15mm fisheye in Nauticam housing + 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes
F8 1/125 ISO200***

tropical waters. We all knew that. In the Seychelles, this is visible in shallower areas, or in waters depths ranging between a few meters to about 15 m. Corals have not been affected in the shallowest areas and in deeper areas below 15 meters.

The Acropora corals, or branching corals, have been severely affected whereas all the porites, or stone corals, are largely intact. Soft corals have also died but they have already grown back. Luckily, fish diversity has not been disturbed.

The Biter Reef was the first dive

spot; it was quite far away from Mahé, the main island. In general, only a few dive centres go that far. We had to navigate for about 45 minutes to get there. Our dive began at 30 meters and then, it was mostly around 20 meters. The visual was quite incredible. Some beautiful colourful rocks were surrounded by huge schools of fishes such as yellow snappers and fusilier fishes. Small white tip sharks came to welcome us to their universe. We also watched the ballet performance of a beautiful nurse shark. Then came some grey reef sharks, and more



***Liz our divemaster diving close to Mamelle Rock
Nikon D850 + 15mm fisheye in Nauticam housing + 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes
F10 1/160 ISO200***

showed up. Stunning marbled feather tailed stingrays and other types of stingrays, could be spotted all over.

Batfishes were dancing gracefully right above our heads, in the blue, following us all the way back to the boat.

This first dive was the best. The rich life, the variety of fish species, and the beautiful red, orange, and yellow colours made it hard for me to finish the dive. I stayed until I was almost out of air! (I do not advise anyone to do this, it's really unsafe!). Liz was angry with me (for a minute);

sometimes, I tend to “get hungry” when I dive in such impressive and incredibly special dive spot. The second dive in the area was certainly not less amazing.

Our friend Mor, the group's free-diver and beautiful mermaid, “free-dived” to the depths to join us. It was such a delight to shoot pictures of this beautiful mermaid's choreography in perfect symbiosis with the incredible reefs and colourful fish schools.

We were eager to visit that site again and we did so a few days later. Unfortunately, weather conditions



***Oren my buddy shooting some yellow snappers shoals at Biter Rock
Nikon D850 + 15mm fisheye in Nauticam housing + 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes
F10 1/80 ISO200***

were not the best, the visibility was poor and the currents were strong; however, we still enjoyed the dives. Even in difficult conditions, this site's diversity offers the most incredible spectacle.

Our next stop was at the Mamelles Reef. The Seychelles used to be a French colony; therefore, most places bear French names. Then, the Seychelles became an English colony; and so, English (together with Creole) is the national language. Mamelles is the French word for "breasts", supposedly referring to the island's

double rock looking like a pair of boobs emerging out of the water.

The Mamelles reef is a shallow and friendly site. There, we saw many stingrays relaxing on the ground and many kinds of reef fishes. Lots of life!

The next day, we went to the Therese Reef. This shallow area reminds me a little of some the dive sites in Southern Egypt with their huge underwater coral heads. Next to the reef, the beautiful Therese Island was the perfect place for photo sessions.

Our last dive in the region was



***Stingray passing over a yellow snappers shoal in Biter Rock
Nikon D850 + 15mm fisheye in Nauticam housing + 2 Ikelite DS125 strobes
F10 1/80 ISO200***

in a beautiful Brissare Rocks dive site. it features a small tunnel at a depth of 8 meters. Again, conditions were rather bad that day, with lots of surge and poor visibility. It was not easy to move ahead, but we could still appreciate the wealth of life and tons of colourful fishes, turtles, octopuses and more.

On our way back to the marina, rain was pouring, then we suddenly saw a fin crossing the sea surface ...it was a whale shark dorsal fin... we put our masks and fins on to be ready to get in the water. We waited

to see the fin again and got as close as possible to the shark then jumped...I found myself face to face, eye to eye with the whale shark!!! That was so moving! But shit happens...I tried to shoot some pictures, but because of all the stress, apparently a camera setting was modified by mistake, and no image was shot...the meeting with the shark was so short, by the time I turned the camera off and on, the shark was gone...I was so upset!! One of the most amazing moments ever, but no way to shoot a picture ... at least, my friend Oren succeeded



Oren portraying a giant tortoise in La Digue - Anse Source d'Argent. Nikon D500, tF5.6 1/125 ISO100

to get a great shot. I succeeded to get probably the most amazing shot of all our stay, while our Mermaid Mor, moments after having seen the whale shark, so moved, exploded with joy in the water, that was a unique moment!

At the end of the day, we had an amazing diving experience in the Seychelles. Hopefully, we'll go back soon and dive the amazing remote Aldabra Islands. The Aldabra Island location is a bit far, but certainly worth exploring.

Some practical info

The Seychelles, are great

throughout the year. However, like in every tropical country, keep in mind that there are two monsoon seasons, one from July to September, during which, there are some precipitations, and the other from the end of November to February, during which, it rains hard.

Most of the year, people dive with full or shorty 3mm wetsuits. From July to August, people prefer wearing a full 5mm wetsuit.

If you have an option, choose a full wetsuit rather than a shorty; it will do a better job of protecting you from



Mermaid Mor on a typical Seychelles rock at sunrise Nikon D500 +Nikon SB800 Flash. F13 1/100 ISO100

the sun, your knees from the rocks and from cold currents you may cross during the dives.

In the Seychelles, the sun is always up, even when it hides behind the clouds. Make sure to protect yourself as you can get sunburned quickly without realizing it, especially when you are on a boat and with the water reflection.

At some point, when we were at the market, my friends offered to sell me as a tomato, inferring that I had taken a bit too much sun.

Some hotels are truly

unforgettable, and they add a lot to the vacation. For instance, the H Resort/ Story Seychelles is a pure dream of place. We enjoyed tremendously our stay in this beautiful place located right in the middle of nature, on the beach, in the area of Beau Vallon. Can you believe that they have their own natural lake, and they recycle everything?!!!

Besides the amazing dives it offers, there are many other ways to enjoy yourself in that little paradise. For example, you can visit the beautiful beaches on the La Digue



Michel and Mermaid Mor, photo by Oren Cohen

Island with ancient typical granite blocs and green palm trees (this is a must), the huge “coco del mare” coconuts in Praslin, the giant tortoises, the creole food, and music, and much more... The Seychelles are also a great place for family holidays.

The giant tortoises are on most islands. If you go to the Curieuse Island, at 10 minutes away from La Digue, you can see the tortoises walking all over the island, completely free. Originally, the tortoises were all brought from the remote Aldabra islands.

If you speak French, sometimes you will surely smile when hearing

to the local creole language, but even more so when you read the Creole. It looks like French but written differently.

Regarding restaurant, I can recommend two amazing places that offer local creole cuisine: Marie-Antoinette and Chez Batista. In Victoria, Bravo is also delicious, it offers a more modern cuisine.

Note to Editor: “Apologies for using the word “beautiful” so many times. A month later, I am still so in awe by this unforgettable scenery”.

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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

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

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**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.

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