



The wreck of the Chrisoula K truly is evidence that nature takes and nature gives. The wreck has completely been engulfed by corals and now appears as an extension of the reef itself for life to flourish.

Diving here truly is an experience for any diver, seasoned wreck-enthusiast or nature lover with a taste for reefs. Diving here leaves everyone wanting more.

Peter Stenberg
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Melasti Macro

by Ollie Newhouse

My wife and I had travelled to Bali once before for our honeymoon, where we dived only briefly. This time, however, we were returning solely with the intention of capturing the macro life Tulumben is famous for. Equipped with an Olympus EM1 MK II in a Nauticam housing, two Inon S-2000 strobes, a snoot, and a Nauticam CMC-1 wet lens, I was about a year out of practice but eager to get back into some clear water after a particularly slow start to the British summer, where murky green water still reigned when our flight departed Heathrow T4.

After a gruelling flight, the humid, frangipani-scented air let us know unequivocally that we had arrived in Bali. Three hours in a taxi later, we found ourselves in Amed, ready for diving tomorrow.

Tulumben is universally recognized by divers for its most popular dive site, the USAT Liberty—a United States Army cargo vessel torpedoed by the Imperial Japanese Navy in 1942 while en route from Australia to the Philippines. Shortly after, it beached itself on Tulumben's black sandy shores.

In the years that followed, multiple earthquakes caused the Liberty to slide back beneath the waves, where it has remained ever since. Naturally, I had to dive there first: camera check, strobes check, lens cap check, O-rings check. And into the water I went, using an M.Zuiko 8mm Pro fisheye lens and a 4-inch Nauticam dome.

With two Inon strobes, I had to pick my subjects carefully; as brilliant as the Inon S-2000 (the predecessor to the newly released S-220s) strobes are, they are better suited to macro subjects. However, aside from reefscapes, they hold up well for the price point.

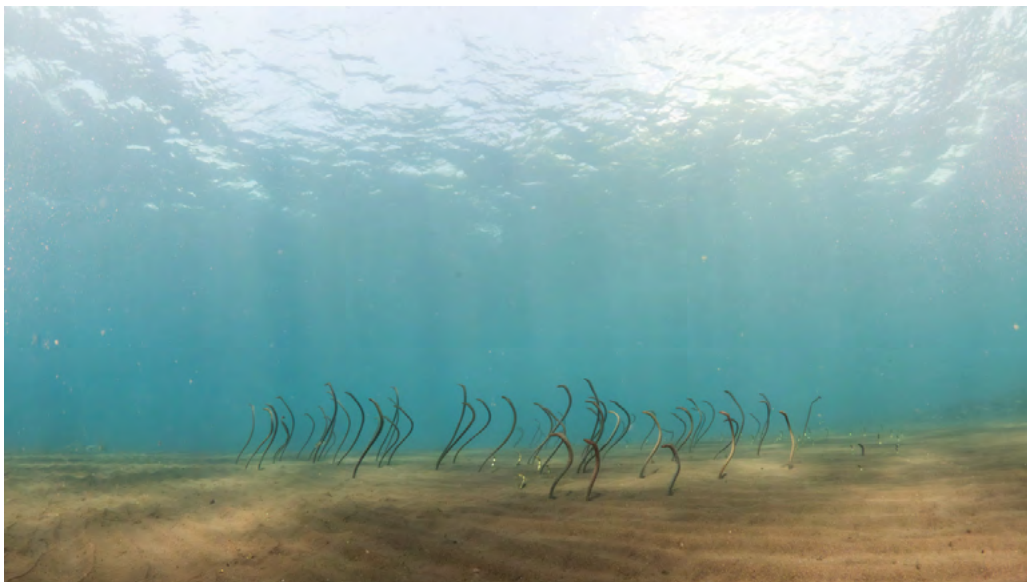
Large barrel sponges and sea fans with resident feather stars were the highlights for me. I was saddened to hear from my dive guides that the resident bumphead parrotfish, which I had seen so many photos of on the Liberty wreck, were no longer as prevalent as they once were, due to illegal fishing during the COVID-19 pandemic when locals had to spear them for food. This was a sobering reminder of just how far-reaching and grim the pandemic has been,



Peacock Mantis Shrimp staring menacingly
Olympus Em1 mk II, Nauticam NA-EM1 II housing, two INON S-2000 strobes, M.Zuiko 60mm Macro, F13, 1/250, ISO 200

Our first Glimpse of the mighty USAT Liberty
Olympus Em1 mk II, Nauticam NA-EM1 II housing, two INON S-2000 strobes, 8mm M.Zuiko F1.8 fisheye lens, F9, 1/40, ISO 400





*A meadow of garden eels greeted us on the beginning of our route to the liberty
8mm M.Zuiko F1.8 fisheye lens, F13, 1/160, ISO 800*

particularly for the tourist industry and those areas so dependent on it.

The wreck itself was as impressive as I had imagined, spanning from its shallowest point at just 3 meters down to 30 meters at its deepest. With a large open cargo hold, you can swim up and through towards the surface. An abundance of life clings to and inhabits the Liberty, offering both wide-angle and macro opportunities. Nudibranchs, pipefish, and small reef fish are abundant. A highlight before we arrived at the wreck was a large meadow of garden eels playing their game of peekaboo with me as I made my slow approach to photograph them. As I got closer,

trying to breathe as calmly as possible so as not to startle them, they would sink slowly down into their chambers. Fortunately, they allowed me the opportunity to snap a few shots before completely disappearing. I have been fascinated by these creatures ever since reading David Doubilet's account of them in his book *Water Light Time*, and I was thrilled to capture my own photographs of the species.

Once the two dives on the Liberty were complete, the bar for diving in East Bali had indeed been set high. However, this bar was cleared with the power and vigour of an Olympic pole vaulter, and for this, I owe a huge



*The Seemingly less common Squilla (Lysiosquillidae)
Mantis Shrimp
Olympus Em1 mk II, Nauticam NA-EM1 II housing, two INON S-2000 strobes, M.Zuiko 60mm Macro, Nauticam CMC-2 Wet lens F9, 1/250, ISO-200*

thanks to my dive guide, Ivan, at No Fear Diving in Amed.

The next dives were when we got into the good stuff: the macro and super macro. We arrived at Sidem Beach, Tulumben. To the right lay a pristine coral reef, reminiscent of those seen in Jacques Cousteau documentaries or BBC's *Blue Planet*, a kaleidoscope of colours and species all fighting for attention. To the left was some black volcanic sand, scattered with rubbish and tufts of rock and seaweed, affectionately known as "muck." Any self-respecting underwater photographer immediately turns left.

Armed with the tried-and-tested M.Zuiko 60mm and the CMC-1, we descended beneath the still azure waters and into the macro world.

Sidem and Melasti are two of the great muck diving sites in East Bali, both within 20 minutes of each other. I will address these two dives as one dive site, as they are both very similar and equally magnificent.

Gentle slopes of volcanic sand make macro subjects pop out in dramatic clarity against their obsidian background. The most challenging part of diving in this location is a sort of critter triage—deciding which species to settle down with and spend precious time, camera battery, and nitrox on, and which to move on from to continue the hunt. This is a problem I was very glad to have.

A peacock mantis shrimp proved to be a particular challenge. Positioning the strobes in such a way as to illuminate the creature without

making it look flat was tricky. As it slunk back into its crevice, I had to keep the strobes tight enough to the port so they wouldn't be blocked by the surrounding rock. Shortly after photographing this subject, I encountered a *Squilla* mantis for the first time, with its raptor-like appendages tucked tightly beneath its large body, ready to stealthily ambush its unsuspecting prey. Its alien eyes followed me as I composed my shot, swivelling on their axis in such a curious way that I couldn't help but feel it was pondering me deeply, or sizing me up...

As Ivan and I descended deeper, we came across a seemingly barren bed of small, leaf-like fronds of seaweed. However, to the super macro-trained eye of my dive guide, this location was teeming with life. This is the habitat of the fan-favourite sacoglossa, the Shaun the Sheep sea slug. I managed to locate a larger (approximately 5mm) individual, and once my buoyancy was as required, I began snapping away at this bucket list species.

Ivan, meanwhile, was scouting the area for more subjects, when suddenly I heard a loud shout about 5 meters to my right (quite an impressive feat underwater). Ivan was pointing at a large *Stiliger Ornatus*, a species we had discussed the day before in the dive shop. Ivan's love for this slug is so strong that he has a tattoo resembling it occupying most of his forearm.

Once the excitement subsided enough for us to regain control of our faculties, we both started snapping away at this incredible species, essentially a Shaun the Sheep sacoglossa with iridescent blue



Finding this Stiliger Ornatus with Ivan was a highlight of the trip Olympus Em1 mk II, Nauticam NA-EM1 II housing, two INON S-2000 strobes, M.Zuiko 60mm Macro, Nauticam CMC-2 Wet lens, F18, 1/250, ISO 200

and yellow bands spanning the full length of its body and feathery appendages. A gentle current kept its leafy stage moving erratically, allowing me to test the limits of the 2016-built EM1 MK II's autofocus, and I really cannot complain at all. I love this camera, and as things stand, its most limiting factor is, was, and most likely always will be its operator, in my case anyway. I steadied myself and composed a portrait of this slug, and after capturing the shot I had in mind, I put the camera aside and appreciated the moment for a minute or two before moving on.

I could write for pages about all the species I saw during my dives in Melasti and Sidem. I ticked so many species off my bucket list that I lost count:



The fan favourite Shaun the Sheep Sacoglossa Olympus Em1 mk II, Nauticam NA-EM1 II housing, two INON S-2000 strobes, M.zuiko 60mm Macro, Nauticam CMC-2 Wet Lens, F11, 1/250, ISO-200

ghost pipefish, clown frogfish, seahorses, pom-pom crabs, and nudibranchs of every shape, size, and description imaginable. Truly a paradise for macro photography.

Just when I thought we had seen the full spectrum of photographic opportunities this small corner of East Bali has to offer, I was given the chance to do some UV night diving, a style of diving/photography that had always intrigued me. The ethereal nature of photographs taken in this style never fails to capture my eye. So, of course, I accepted.

Armed with my trusty 60mm and two large