

Digital liveaboard diving

by Rod Klein

When diving most areas of the world, if I have a choice to either take a quality liveaboard or stay at a land based resort, I will always take the liveaboard. As a matter of fact, taking a liveaboard charter not only offers the best diving experience with its ability to visit dive sites that a land based operation simply can't reach, it is also certainly one of the most relaxing dive vacations one can imagine. No phones, no TV, just great company, great food, and great diving.

Once aboard you never have to move your gear, be late and miss the boat for the morning dives, try and figure out when or where to eat (whiney voice: Honnnney, where do you want to eat tonight!?), and endure all the other inconveniences of most land based diving. Your gear is set up once, with tanks filled at their stations, and you can't be late because "you're already there".

You can always sleep in and still get up for breakfast and start your dive day on the 2nd dive, and with up to 5 dives per day, missing that first



The Kararu Liveaboard where I spent 11 days diving in Indonesia. Kodak SLR/n 24-120 VR Zoom

dive just may not be such a big deal. Excellent meals are served on board so going hungry is just not an option.

A Kararu guest takes time out for a good book and some sun. Not only great for the underwater photographer, it's just a great dive vacation.

As one liveaboard guest once told me, "Where can you take a vacation and take your shoes off at the beginning of the week and not put them on again until you leave at the end of the week?"



Both wide angle and macro opportunities abound offering great opportunities for the digital shooter. Nikon D100 / L&M Titan / Inon Strobes. (Left) 10.5mm fisheye / 125sec / f/16 (Right) 60 mm Macro / 125sec / f/32



Stay Organized

While I have done liveaboards in the Caribbean, Fiji, Tahiti, Australia, Hawaii, and Micronesia, I had never done a liveaboard charter in Indonesia. As a photographer committed 100% to shooting digital, I wanted make my 11-day, 650-mile charter an opportunity to push the envelope of my digital skills.

Once on board the Kararu, my first task was to unpack and setup my

photo gear. (I personally do this even before I move into my room or set up my dive gear) I try and make this task as easy as possible by organizing everything when I pack before the trip. Even before I put my gear into my travel cases, everything goes in to individual soft protective cases, labeled individually so I can put each item back into the same place at the end of the trip. I have found inexpensive beer or food coolers, normally used for camping, to be



A dedicated camera preparation area

perfect for housing, port, and strobe storage.

Make sure to carry extra tools, o-ring grease, and other necessary spare parts. Labeling your small items is key to staying organized.

My goal when setting up my photo gear is to be as organized as possible so having my tools in a dedicated tool bag, parts and accessories in their own bag, strobe arms in their own bag, etc, just helps this process. As any quality liveaboard should, the Kararu had a large, dedicated camera area with individual storage space so I could keep my lenses, ports, and other accessories off the actual camera workspace. Keeping all accessories dry and separate from dive gear is a big liveaboard advantage.

One of the most important things I do is to place several silica (drying gel) packs inside the various bags as well as the inside the housing itself. Considering the sensitive electronics of digital cameras, this provides an extra margin of safety for keeping everything dry in the wet and normally humid environment of a diveboat.



A full charging station. Both 110v & 220v power is available on the Kararu but you should have extrapower adapters and plugs whenever you travel abroad.

Battery Charging

Part of my setup process is to locate and organize the battery charging area. Some boats will have the charging stations directly on the camera table, normally on one of the lower shelves. Others will have a separate, enclosed area right off the dive deck. The Kararu had theirs located inside the main salon area. Conveniently, they had both 110v and 220v power strips connected to a large multi-output surge protector, so both laptop computers and chargers were safe from any unexpected surges from the boat's generator.

Most current model battery chargers will accept either 110v or 220v power but you should check yours to make sure. Some older models will only accept one or the other, depending on its country of origin. Having a small power converter and various plug adapters is always a good idea when traveling internationally.



Wide Angle View at Gili Lawa Laut. Nikon D100 / L&M Titan / Inon Strobes 10.5 mm lens 125 sec f/16

Since I travel with so many digital accessories, I always bring my own power strip. I purchased one that can take either 110v or 220v input, so it will work anywhere. Unable to buy this type of power strip at my local hardware store, I found a specialized source on the Internet and it is one of the best \$50 investments that I have made.

(Do an Internet search for “power converters”).

Label It or Lose It!

One other thing: I put my name on EVERYTHING. Many divers have similar items and this is especially true with photographic stuff. Battery chargers and other small items all look alike. On a liveaboard, it's easy for someone to unknowingly pick up one of your items thinking it was theirs. (I do this with most of my dive equipment too!)

I use an inexpensive Brother tape label machine, available at any major stationery store, to make my name labels. These labels are actually so waterproof that I use can use them on my underwater photo gear and they will usually last a number of trips before I have to make new labels.

Once the housing is setup, I do a thorough camera and strobe check. Again, I have given everything a complete “twice over” before I even packed for the trip, but “sh_t happens” so I want to make sure I don't have a surprise when I make my first dive.

I charge all my nickel metal hydride strobe batteries, my camera batteries, and my pointer light battery. I make sure my 2 gig compact flash cards have been reformatted, just to make sure that they are empty, and I make some test exposures as a double

check of the camera, strobe, and memory cards.

Because of the large, dedicated camera and battery charging space, this whole setup process went by without a hitch.

A Place To Work After The Dive

So how does working from a liveaboard differ when shooting digital vs. film? Well in general there isn't much difference. The convenience factor is still there for both. Since many film shooters don't even process most of their film on board, their task is over once their dive ends. But with possibility of many hundreds of image files during a weeklong liveaboard, the digital workflow does get more demanding if you want to work with your image files while on board.

A large common area salon makes working with your digital images convenient and fun. Sometimes you get lucky. I had my own desk that I set up as an on-board office so I would work to my heart's content.

A laptop computer which gives you the ability to really get a good feel for your images AND to be able to start editing, is a key element in your digital process. For me, the single most important amenity offered

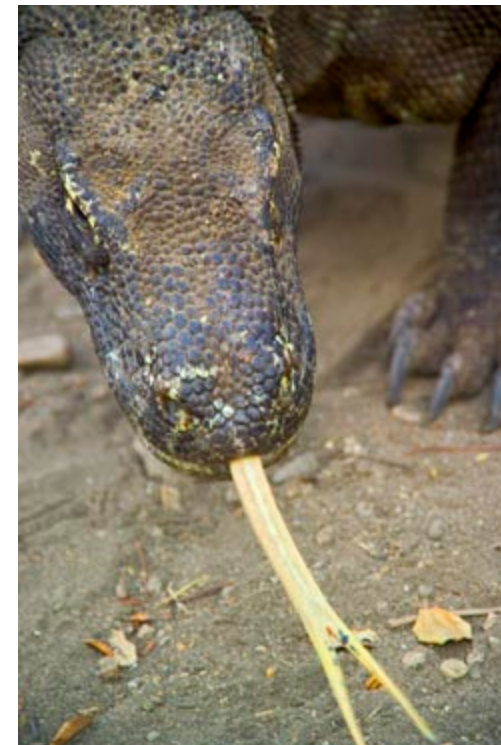


A laptop computer is invaluable for viewing images and sharing them with others.

Freshwater camera-only rinse tanks are essential on a liveaboard



The famed Komodo Dragon. Morning light on Komodo Island

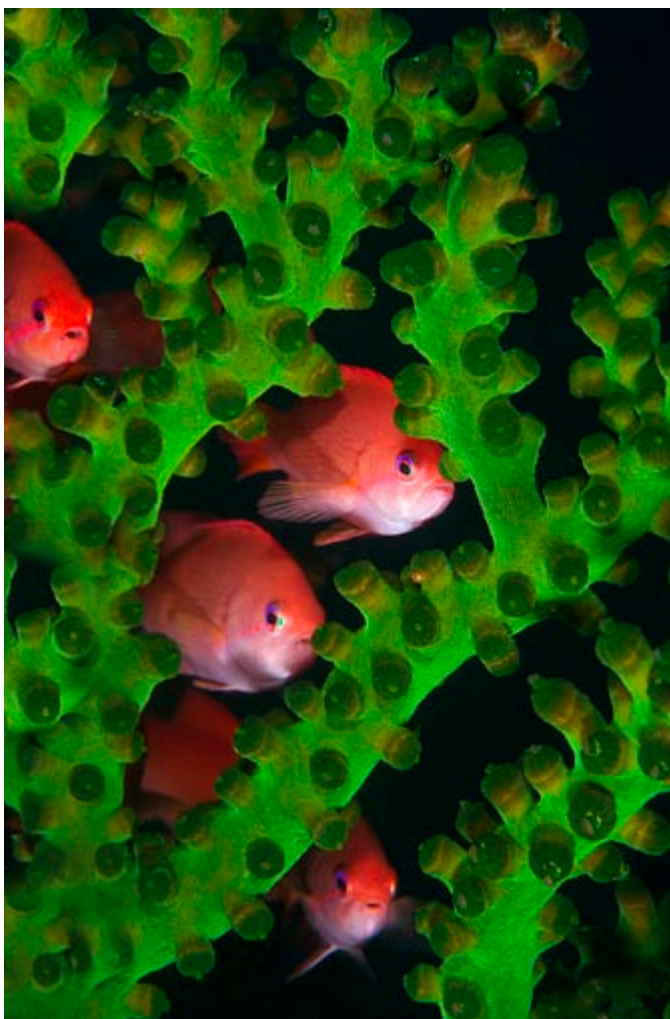


by liveaboard diving is having immediate access to my computer. While some digital shooters wait until they get home to organize and / or edit their images, my laptop and Photoshop are almost as important as my digital SLR and Light & Motion Titan housing. A large liveaboard, like the Kararu, is the ideal place for organizing and post editing your images.

Before arriving in Bali, I expected to find a large salon area with plenty of table space and power outlets to make my computer life easy, but I was really happy to find that my stateroom had a table area and lots of extra space so I could set up a little office right in my own room. This gave me the flexibility to keep my computer set up and my external USB 2 devices (Sony GigaVault hard drive and compact flash card reader) always plugged in and ready to go.

I asked the Kararu's cruise directors, Linda and Karl, if they have seen an increase in digital shooters over the past few years and their answer was an unequivocal "yes!" and while I was onboard there were a number of digital shooters and only one photographer using a film camera. Of the digital shooters, several were new to their camera and housing systems as well as image editing software. The large comfortable salon provided the perfect community workspace for both new and experienced to share their images and seek out advice.

One item that was available on the Kararu (and which I expect will soon be as standard as the old reliable slide projector) was a digital projector that could be easily attached to any computer so anyone could present a digital slideshow of their work direct from their computer.



A Sensual Visual Experience Above and Below

A typical Caribbean liveaboard offers 7-day dive charters with 5 or 6 diving days. When you head out to areas such as Indonesia it is likely that liveaboard operators will offer longer charters, some up to 14 days. These longer charters offer not only more extensive underwater itineraries, but offer the



Always a fun find, Jawfish with Eggs. Being able to review my images and check my exposure on board gave me the opportunity to confirm my images. Nikon D100 / L&M Titan / Inon Strobes 105mm lens 125 sec f/18

opportunity for some interesting land excursions.

During the 11-day charter I kept 330 underwater images and almost 200 topside images (this does not include the images I deleted) so I had lots of images that needed organizing and that I wanted to check out while on board. In addition to the fabulous diving, the Kararu offered a land walk on Komodo Island, which included close sightings of the famous Komodo Dragons, as well as local island and beach visits. Needless to say, both the underwater and topside photo ops were incredible,

and being able to view and organize my images right away while on board was, to say the least, extremely convenient.

Using the Photoshop CS Image Browser I was able to view, rename, and organize all of my images. I was able to select and edit my “keepers”, and using the file browser “automate” function, prepare a web gallery that I posted on my website once I got home and I used Ulead DVD Picture Show to create a fun slideshow that I presented at the end of the charter (although I could have used the Photoshop “PDF Presentation” function as well).

I had a fantastic 11-day trip on the Kararu, met some really nice people, had great diving and best of

all got some great images.

For more information on the Kararu, visit their website: www.kararu.com

Rod Klein

www.rhkuw.com



A promotional graphic for RHKUW PRODUCTIONS & DESIGN. The top left features the company name in white text on a dark background, with 'uw photo', 'web design', and 'multi-media' listed below. To the right is a small photo of Rod Klein. Below the main text is a large image of a scuba diver's arm and hand. At the bottom, it says 'Digital Workshops with Rod Klein' and 'Scuba Club Cozumel Nov 14-18'. There are three small inset photos at the bottom left showing underwater scenes, and a larger photo of a resort building at the bottom right with 'Scuba Club Cozumel' text.

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