

Bali Photo Course

by Gerald Rambert

About an hour on a small plane from Bali, we landed at the Bima national airport, where the team of Worldwide Dive and Sail were waiting for us. Sam, our dive leader was trying to get us out of the airport, through all the harassing luggage carriers, which I still can't get used to.

We then headed to the luxury sailing boat the "Sampai Jumpa Lagi" for an amazing 10 forthcoming days around the Komodo national park, known for both its land and underwater wildlife. Kitty Jempson, was helping me conduct this underwater photography workshop, opened to both compacts and slr users. It was going to be very interesting to observe and compare how the 2 different users were going to get the best out of their underwater cameras. A little competition was then launched, and a free trip back to the Komodo was offered, to spice up a bit the atmosphere.

The boat was specially set up to welcome underwater photographers and huge rinsing tanks and preparation table were installed. Every single room had their own computer with the ability to load slideshows on the large screen display inside the living room. These technologies for sure made our life easier in teaching underwater photography, and conducting evening theory classes.

After the first dive, Kitty and I have already spotted the ones who already had a little knowledge about underwater photography so we decided to split the groups into the slr's and compacts mounted with flashes and the others who were using mainly



*Garden of corals - Nikon D300 in Seacam housing
– 10.5 mm – 2 Inon Z240 – F14@1/320*

*Hawkbill turtle – Nikon D300 in Seacam housing
– 12-24 mm – 2 Inon Z240 – F5.6@1/160*



fisheye lenses.

Some underwater photography shops have given different recommendations regarding the choice of cameras and all the bits and bobs that goes with it. Some would say: Get the fisheye first, others would recommend to buy the flash first. Here was a chance to see what was the best choice.



The Sampai Jumpa Lagi

*Scorpionfish shot by Edoardo spacca with a canon powershot A570 is with a pair of Inon Z240.
F5@1/125*



The fisheye users started taking nice shots, using manual white balance to get some of the red back. The results were pretty surprising, but still the true colours didn't appear. The blue was a bit faded and there was a lack of contrast and the shots were slightly washed out. Seascape and field of corals close to the surface, where there was a lot of

light, were looking not bad at all though.

The zero cm focus point of the INON fisheye was letting some space for creativity, but one problem arose. Everything was perfectly arranged in the shot apart that there was no external source of light to get back the colours of the main subject in the first plan of the picture. The fisheye lens was blocking the use of the camera's internal flash and all the main subjects were coming out completely dark. Not only were the photographers were limited on their composition side, but also when a nice fish was passing by or if they found a nice nudibranch, they could not use their internal flash either, unless unscrewing the whole adaptor blocking partly the light, and loosing some screws in the process. Pretty frustrating and already their progress was limited due to the choice of equipment.

In the second group, the one who were using an external flash were facing a great challenge. They first had to solve out the problem of slave and optical fibre and if their flash was suited or not for their kit. We had to figure out which mode the photographer was using the most, to be able to use the flashes properly on slave mode.

On the Canon Powershots for instance, if you shoot AV mode, the internal flash goes TTL and there is preflash. The external flash had to be set up accordingly. On the other hand, if the user decided to switch to M mode, then the camera goes into manual flash mode and there is no preflash. So the external flash had to be set up in a way that it fires the desired amount when the internal flash of the camera goes off once.

Some had to start using the full manual mode or the aperture priority mode for the first time as well, that was totally new to their world.

Flash position was another issue and Kitty and



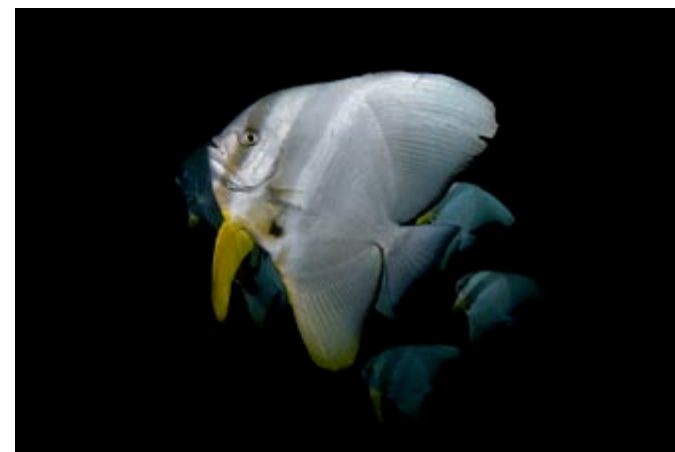
Sam with a cuttlefish - Nikon D300 in Seacam housing – 12-24 mm – 2 Inon Z240 – F6.3@1/250

I spent hours feeding them with the techniques of light balancing underwater and all the theory that goes with it.

It was surprising to see how many more possibilities were offered to them. They could shoot small animals, and portraits of nice fish without any problem. They had full manual control, use smaller apertures and learnt how to play with shutter speed. Wide angle with no more backscatter and the colours were finally the real ones and the compositions much better.

Some had the chance to add an external fisheye onto their system, which was the case of Edoardo Spacca, the winner of the competition. He started with a Sea&Sea DX-1G that he drowned within the first days. I lent him my Canon Powershot A570is with a fisheye lens and he was not disappointed. He was using a pair of Inon Z240 as well.

The second place was taken by Kathryn Prince using also a small Sea & Sea compact camera with an external strobe. And in third position, was Kathy



School of Batfish - Edoardo Spacca – Sea & Sea DX-1G with with 2 inon Z240. F8.1@1/200

White using a Nikon D300 in a Subal housing with 2 Inon strobes. It was surprising to see how compacts did better than SLRs.

Komodo is so diverse in wildlife that a compact camera mounted with fisheye and external flashes is maybe one of the best compromises. It gives you the chance of shooting wide angle and macro on the same dive without going up to the surface again, and still the image quality is fairly good nowadays.

I wish I could change my lenses underwater, on what I thought was the best dive of the trip. Castle Rock is a huge pinnacle that we reached on the third day of diving. Each time, I was staying up to the limit of my air and I wanted more. There was everything on that dive: Sharks, turtles, giant trevallies, school of kingfishes, napoleon wrasse, giant moray eels, barracuda, tuna, clouds of fusiliers and much more. If you felt like you had too much of the big stuff, than you just needed to tilt you head down into the corals and the sea fans and you



Manta Ray on Manta Alley - Nikon D300 in Seacam housing – 10.5 mm – 2 Inon Z240 – F9@1/320

can find pigmy seahorse, loads of angelfishes, and all the creepers of the perfect healthy reef. Apparently, dolphins can be seen often hunting the school of fishes. Hunting chase and strikes were often taking place on the exposed part of reef into the current. On the sheltered part, a pristine garden of corals and barrel sponges was offering great opportunities to composition.

Further south, where the Indian



Barrel Sponge with our Model Estee. Shot by Edoardo Spacca. Canon powershot A570is with 2 inon Z240 and a inon fisheye. F5@1/200

Ocean brings its colder water, the temperature drops to 21 degrees. Manta Halley was the highlight! I counted 10 at once and their gracious movement always please my 10.5 mm fisheye lens.

We then moored in the south of Rinca island, next to Cannibal Rock, where Komodo Dragons have been seen eating each others. Funny to see them walking up and down the beach, drooling, with the smell of breakfast. Wild boar and deer can also seen on the beach early in the morning.

Underwater, an amazing macro life was covering the reef, and I found myself spending a good 50 minutes on a few metres square most of the time. This rich environment was probably due to the green water, full of plankton and nutrients.

Komodo certainly didn't fail to its reputation of having strong currents. On the way back to Bima, we experienced one of the funniest drift dives ever. It was like running underwater and the sand had formed dunes where turtles, sharks and cuttlefish were present. But taking pictures in these currents was another story.

Rollercoaster was another amazing drift dive. The turbulence at the surface of the water was an indication of how strong the current was. We back rolled next to a tip of an island where the current speeds up at the point. A washing machine, but great fun! The dive finishes in a sheltered place at around 10 meters on the most beautiful hard coral and barrel sponge garden of the trip,

where Edoardo took his wonderful shot of Estee, our model, with the barrel sponges.

Komodo is certainly one of the greatest dive destinations there is, with a wide diversity and loads of picture opportunities. We were invited, with pleasure, to renew this experience in September 2009, where Kitty and I will be leading another 2 photo workshop with the "worldwide dive and sail" team. Please do not hesitate to visit the website www.worldwidediveandsail.com for more information about next year expedition and feel free to check the latest news on mine

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