

Komodo Workshop

By Catherine Masson,
Rachel Russel & Cedric Villiere

Catherine Masson

Diving and photography have always been the two things in my life which have remained consistent in my desires for them both, and my eagerness to improve and learn new techniques.

As a student at The London College of Art studying photography, I am learning all sorts of tricks of the trade, meeting very successful photographers and studying the way they work behind the lens. I feel confident now that I know quite a lot about Landscapes, Portraits, Still Life, Beauty and Graphics but without the experience. However, none of these fields of photography compare to capturing beautiful images underwater.

It is a completely different technique using your body to balance yourself and the camera instead of a tripod, searching hard for your subject, instead of planning ahead and building a set. All photographs, if you succeed in what you want to achieve are very rewarding. None however, give me the same satisfaction or butterflies in my stomach if I have captured a turtle looking right at me from just a couple of centimeters, or flying with a Manta Ray whose enormous wing span manages to fit in my wide angle lens, or discovering something you have never ever seen before and you capture it for your memories.

Although this is exciting, no underwater images are any achievement if the picture is not sharp! And believe me, sometimes this can be quite



Kayaking during the surface interval, next to the impressive S.Y. Philippine Siren © G. Rambert

tough work if you have a current trying to whisk you away from your subject, or your buoyancy is not controlled so you can't stay as still, or worse, you get so distracted you forget your depth, and your time and this can have devastating consequences.

I see underwater photography as a challenge, with many obstacles but if done correctly the pictures are not only outstanding they are incredibly rewarding because you managed with patience and skills to get it. Underwater photography is an addiction but a beautiful one!

One person who knows more about this than any other is Gerald Rambert, who has inspired me from a young age to take a lens with me into the water. His work is extraordinary and I was amazed at how his eyes could spot the tiniest creature. His body always stayed in control of the water, long enough for him to get close and steady his camera to use his macro lens to capture his subjects. Many of us would dive close to him to watch the way he moved and to study his style. We knew that if he



Yellow Rhinopias taken with a canon G10 in Ikelite housing & Ikelite strobe. F4@1/60 © C. Masson

Turtle taken with a canon G10 in Ikelite housing & Ikelite strobe. F4@1/60 © C. Masson



was photographing something- it would definitely be something worthwhile to take yourself or to even spot what it was he had seen!

I will never forget when we were diving with

15 sharks- white tipped and black tipped reef sharks and the occasional loan bull shark. He managed to sneak up on a white tipped reef shark round the corner of a bit of reef sheltering him from the current. The picture is extraordinary and I never knew you could get that close to a shark or that they roamed around so close to the reef!

Gerald was a great teacher as well. His patience was outstanding with us all trying to get his attention to ask countless questions and to explain to us individually how we could improve our technique. The results were outstanding because at the end of the trip, when we all got to see each others work, we were amazed at how much we had improved in those two weeks of having help from him.

Kitty Jempson, another photographer was also full of enthusiasm and encouragement to us. She was also like Gerald; a fish who seemed to disappear for hours while we were all up out of air on the boat waiting for her to emerge with her infamous model Chris. I very much enjoyed showing her my photos for well structured criticism and she was so good at cutting the bad from the good. Her pictures were also outstanding in composition and sharpness and it was always exciting to take a peak at her images.

The photography teaching we had was incredible. None of us felt intimidated or overshadowed. We were a team, a team of learners. For me, managing to grasp the technique of manual photography underwater and using a big strobe for the first time was the best. I finally learnt how to have a relationship with my camera and this is now going to be my lifeline in achieving a successful career as a freelance photographer. I yearn to be back in the water every day, to be back on the boat

with all the team who worked so hard to look after us and to be surrounded by all those very talented photographers- amateurs or not, we came back as professionals! I am already saving all that I have and counting all those long nights and cold days until our next photography trip with Worldwide Dive and Sail in the Philippines!

Rachel Russel

Exceptional diving with so many photo opportunities from dolphins, sharks and manta rays to spawning sponges, zebra crabs, numerous nudis and the ever-so cute pigmy seahorse. So much colour, so much variety, such great light & visibility and all of it completely to ourselves. That's the beauty of Komodo! Plus of course the infamous Komodo Dragon. What a treat to get up so close and personal to these powerful and imposing carnivores.

So how was the photography? Even as a beginner I loved every minute of it. Watching and learning from the pro's I literally witnessed my own photos improving with every dive. Yes, even me with my little Canon compact, fish-eye and strobe I found myself taking the most amazing photos within days. Whether just getting to grips with the basics of composition or grappling with the more bamboozling relationships between exposure, shutter speed, depth of field, etc Gerald & Kitty were readily on hand with helpful advice and demonstrations both above and below the surface. Even the evenings were put to good use, over a few beers of course, learning how to crop, sharpen, brighten and clone in Photoshop on the massive 47" flat screen TV in the lounge bar.

And that leads me to comment on the boat itself: Worldwide Dive and Sail's newest fleet



***IXUS 90 IS
with Inon
Fisheye and
Inon Strobe.
F8@1/60
© R. Russel***



***IXUS 90 IS
with Inon
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member, the S.Y. Philippine Siren. A truly spacious and luxurious 40m yacht, designed by divers with diving & photography in mind. Remarkable attention to detail in its building and furnishing, there are power sockets everywhere, dedicated fresh

water tanks for camera equipment and each diver has his own station with a personal draw to keep safe those little bits of dive gear that inevitably would go missing. There's ample space in the cabins with each one having its own "ensuite" plus a desk & chair with computer & flat screen for downloading and viewing your very own pictures. Similarly the communal spaces are just as roomy with comfy leather sofas and a (slightly temperamental) espresso machine. And when we did manage to tear ourselves away from the cameras the upper sundeck was a perfect haven for 40 winks between dives.

The dedicated crew are a lot of fun too. We certainly were not allowed to go hungry by the talented chefs who would serve up delicious meals inspired from all around the world on a (very) regular basis. My personal favourite being the gooey hot-chocolate pudding - exactly what's needed after a late night dive. Then there's the hot towels and magical massages that could put any insomniac into a restful slumber. And from a diving perspective, we always felt in very safe hands with the experienced dive guides and the boat handling skills of the Zodiac drivers. And of course, the boat owner himself, Frank who stamps his own personal style on the whole operation making it impossible for anyone to go home without a smile.

It's been a couple of weeks since I arrived back home and I'm still buzzing from the thrills of such a wonderful trip and I find myself grinning like a Cheshire cat every time I glance up at my very own works of art on the office wall. In fact I enjoyed the trip so much I've already booked myself in for next year's workshop. Yes, I'm addicted and I can't wait!

Cedric Villiere

"Shades of blue and grey, snow flakes, weird light... underwater photography can be a very tricky activity, and the results just so far from what you saw... So, when friends proposed me to join them on a cruise in Komodo where the team of World Dive and Sail organized an UW photography workshop, I jumped at it!

First step, change my digital compact for something more serious. First contacts with Gerald, and a couple of emails down the road, Cath, Paul & me, decided to go for the same kit, a Canon G10, combined with Patima Housing and Sea&Sea strobes. Manual settings but not too complex or bulky, I think this was a perfect choice for the three musketeers!

After the stress of the first dive, "will it leak?" things went very smoothly. The kit is comparatively heavy for compact but very well balanced, easy to manipulate and logical.

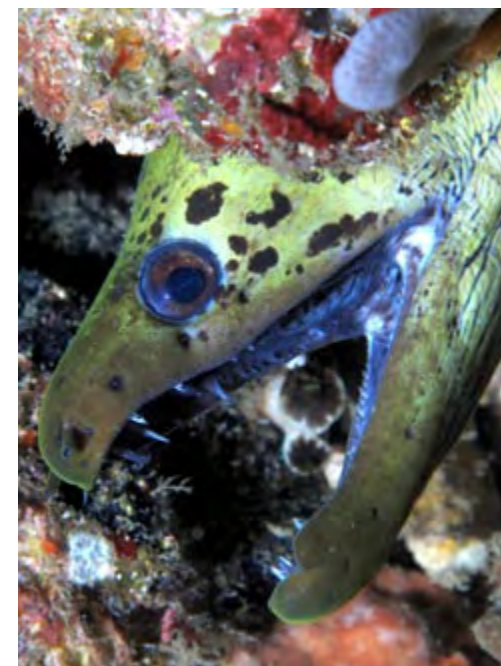
First results were already a quantum leap but then we sat with Gerald, and he went through the G10 possibilities. With a couple of very direct facts and simple examples, he made relatively obscure concepts very clear. After a couple of sessions, aperture, shutter speed, exposure, and the direct impact of the settings on the images became very obvious.

Back in the water, the pics improved dramatically... Deep and clear blue backgrounds, bright colours, correct light, a whole new world appeared through our lenses. For the first time, I had the impression to bring back to the surface what we saw below it. Sometimes, even nicer...

Then Gerald and Kitty took us to the next step, with the tech side improving fast, we had to train



Crocodile fish . Canon Powershot G10 in Patima Housing . F4.5@1/125



Morey eel . Canon Powershot G10 in Patima Housing . F4.5@1/100

our eye, get the best out of a possible shot, learn how to position ourselves or the subject in a better way, pick the right angle, choose the right light, and moved rather fast from technically OK to nice pictures...

Back on the boat, the final touch is given by couple of clicks on the laptop, "et voila !"

The real amazing thing is how simple it has been to take those lessons underwater with us, apply them to real dive conditions and bring them to life (or to the screen...). Not to forget a funny side effect, some of those lessons also apply above water, and allowed me to bring my DSLR to a next level too...

After ten days, and many dives, I really have the impression something clicked and that my pics are getting there... Still so many things to learn, and skills to improve, but my results at the local competition and comments from friends, back home, made me very happy.

**Catherine Masson,
Rachel Russel
& Cedric Villiere**



PHILIPPINES PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKSHOP
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The graphic features a large yellow circle with the text "THE UNDERWATER PHOTO & VIDEO PORTAL". To the left, several Polaroid-style photos show underwater scenes: a jellyfish, a shark, a diver, and a turtle. Below the circle, a laptop screen displays a diver underwater, with a large camera lens in the foreground. The background is a blue and white wave pattern.