

Using the Sigma 8-16mm Ultra-Wide Zoom

Story & Photos by Tim Rock with Elaine Kwok

When news of the Sigma 8-16mm F4.5-5.6 DC HSM ultra-wide zoom first came out, I was elated. I like to use Nikon DSLR cameras with APS-C size image sensors. This little marvel would give me a 35mm equivalent angle of view of a 12-24mm lens.

My idea of a perfect dive trip is when I never have to use a macro lens during the duration of a trip. So what I could do with an 8-16 on wrecks, in caves, for reef panos, shooting models and with big marine life was boggling my mind. According to the usual pre-release hype, Sigma's FLD glass elements, equal to fluorite glass, correct for distortions and color aberrations to deliver beautiful high contrast images. Yee-haw.

My order from B&H arrived and I unpacked it and noticed it was quite a bit bigger in length and barrel size than my bread and butter Tokina 10-17mm workhorse. Still, it isn't a monster and the lens shade is built in to reduce flare.

This lens fit well into my Aquatica housings on both the D90 and D200 cameras. I used the 8mm

wide dome and a couple of extension rings. Basically the same set-up I use for my Sigma 17-70mm Macro zoom.

I was looking at the 8-16's minimum focusing distance of 9.4" (24cm) allowing CFWA images to get in close to a subject to create some cool exaggerated perspectives. At 8mm, it really does some interesting things both good and bad.

So myself and my high energy model Elaine Kwok decided we'd try some new stuff to put this thing through the paces. We had been looking at some nice natural light shots done with a model in European lakes. Elaine asked me where that could be done in our neck of the woods and I told her the amazing cave in Rota, an island 30 miles north of Guam, had a hole in the cave roof that created a mesmerizing shaft of light about 2 hours a day when the sun is strong. So we rounded up some gear and props and made our way to Rota.

Mark Michael of Dive Rota knew the exact times for the proper lighting conditions and soon we were finning into the undersea cathedral of



Senhanom Cave. There are actually two places in this massive cave where divers can see sunlight... one in the upper roof and one along a back ledge. One can surface here and we set up shop. Sans tank, Elaine recalled her ballet days of youth as I moved up and down and in and out with the 8-16, trying to use a combination of natural and Ikelite strobe light to make some surreal images.

I noticed I could work extremely close to her at every range. Distortion at 8mm was pretty minimal if I kept her center frame. There was no real problem at all at 16mm. But if a hand or foot got too close to the lens at 8mm, a very elongated distortion made her look a bit like E.T. So we had to watch that.

But it was tack sharp, fast focusing and wide as wide could be. We tried different outfits on different dives and also some scuba shots. Shooting in this cave is magical and we had a lot of fun. Or at least I did. Elaine had to hold her breath for the better part of two hours, lost a few sacrificial contacts, froze to death and that sort of model thing. But her hard work paid off with some special images.

Back in Guam, we were working on a book on Guam five marine preserve areas. Two of these are in shallow bays that range from 6 to 30 feet. In the Tumon Bay preserve, there is white sand, tons of fish big and small and stunning, gin clear water, especially on high, incoming tide.

Here we tried lots of natural light images at both superwide and 16mm and got some pleasing results. The wide setting seemed to elongate the model's legs and fins a bit, which was acceptable to both her and me.

We also stumbled onto a coral spawn in the daytime over the reef in the deeper part of this



preserve and watched the release could the water and reef. The wide lens allowed me to free dive down to 25 feet or so and get right into it and also shoot some spawning panoramas.

Shooting coral in shallow water with this lens at 8-10mm lets one see the clouds through clear water, the early morning rays of sunlight coursing through the surface and get very close to stationary subjects like coral heads to maximize color and still



create nice wide scenics. It does not have a filter slot in back and the built-in lens shade prevents the use of a front filter. But someone clever could certainly



trim a Magic Filter to fit the back I am sure.

Another nice touch is that Sigma claims it has done a couple of things to the glass and lens configuration to reduce flare. We tried some scenics and overlooks at sunset time and found for such a super wide lens, flare was minimal in most cases.

This lens is noticeably wider than the Nikon 12-24 and the 10-24. It focuses quickly and quietly. It does let in a lot of light, so you have to shoot manually or really watch your meter in auto modes. It is fun to use in video as you can swim over the reef with it and through schooling fish and get a

real IMAX effect!

As a wide angle zoom freak, I love this lens. I worked well with my Aquatica housings and there is an Aquatica zoom ring available to fit this lens. I'm having fun with it and it is working its way into the workhorse position in my array. I don't think it is going to outdo my 10-17 Tokina, but it has some great creative applications no other housed lens can offer at this point. Give it a try wide freaks!!

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