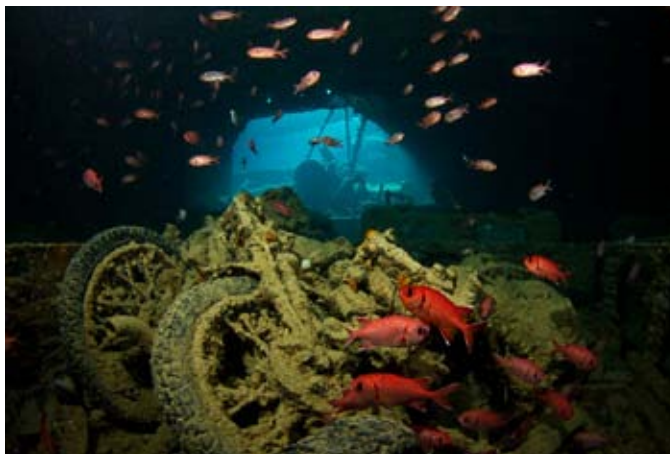


tides so as to reduce the currents divers typically experience when diving the Thistlegorm. While we did experience mild currents on several dives, the currents became weaker over the 3 days and we were fortunate to have a couple of dives with absolutely no current. On one dive we not only had no current we also had no other divers in the water so we had the entire wreck to ourselves making it much easier to get shots without divers and their bubbles.

The second phase of the trip was spent diving on the reefs around the Ras Mohammed National Park and in the Strait of Tiran. During this part of the workshop we learned among other techniques, how to get a good color blue in the water, how to compose a photograph to show depth and how to use the sun to get nice sun rays as well as silhouettes.

Most days consisted of a morning diving, mid-day dive and late afternoon dive. After each dive, everyone would download their photographs and begin reviewing their images. During this time between dives lots of time was spent sharing ideas amongst the group including ways to improve photographs, discuss post-processing techniques, talk about different angles that could work as well as plans for what we should do on our next dive to improve upon the photos we had taken. This time spent with the other participants of the workshop was extremely valuable and was also where I picked up several tips.

On most days, Alex would give a talk on various topics such as composition and lighting techniques. He timed his presentations so that they were applicable to the dive we would be doing immediately following the talk. We would then try using the newly learned techniques on the next



IMG_0770: BSA Motorbikes in the back of a truck. 1/5th sec at f/8.0, ISO 640, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 10mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240

dive and discuss the results with Alex and the other photographers in the workshop. If the results were not quite what we wanted, we had an opportunity to get feedback on the technique and try again. On most evenings, an image review was conducted where each photographer shared a couple of their images from the week and received feedback from Alex and the other photographers in the workshop; it was a great way to learn and improve.

Having never used a wide-angle lens underwater before, I had a lot to learn. Fortunately, my rookie mistakes were learned early and I had an opportunity to try again fairly quickly. One of the first lessons for me was configuring the settings on my camera to separate auto-focus from the shutter button. The idea being to make pressing the shutter button half-way only meter and not auto-focus. Auto-focus is then connected to the AF-on button. Disconnecting auto-focus from the



IMG_1242: Lionfish on lettuce coral. 1/125th sec at f/13, ISO 200, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 10mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240

shutter is especially important when shooting inside a dark area such as the hold of a wreck because if you don't do this your camera will spend all of its time hunting when you try to take a picture. Once this configuration is set, the trick is to focus your lens on something 3-4 feet away before you go into the dark hold. Once you have this focus, you'll be good for the dive. I made one dive early on where everything was out of focus as I had forgotten to focus before going into the hold. On your camera's small LCD screen everything looks great! It's only after downloading the photos to the computer that you suddenly get a dose of reality.

One piece of advice Alex provided is that when taking photos of subjects within the holds of a wreck, it's important to make sure that the item being photographed is not just random wreckage, but is easily identifiable. You don't want to create an image that requires the viewer to struggle in

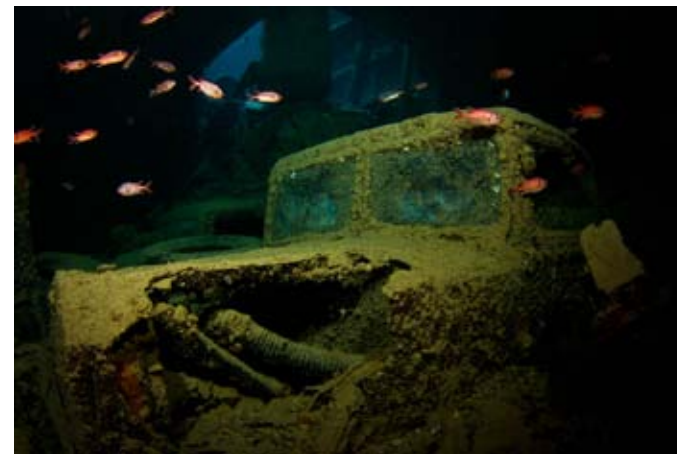
order to identify what it is they are looking at. Also key, is to create some depth to your image. This can be accomplished by finding subjects where you can position yourself such that the background of the image has a view of the sea outside the hold. It's also nice if you can get pictures of fish in the photo to help identify the image as an underwater photograph. If there is no way to find some blue outside the hold, the use of off-camera strobes to light up a deeper space within the wreck is another way to create depth. Image 1 [IMG_763] shows one of my first attempts of photographing a truck inside the hold. This was taken on the first dive before any presentations or advice. It's an okay shot and I would have been happy with it before the workshop. On my fourth dive and attempt, I finally managed to start getting the type of shots I was looking for. In image 2 [IMG_868-Edit], I've chosen a different subject (what has come to be known as "Julian's truck") that allows me to pick up the ambient light from the sea outside the hold as well as capture some fish in the picture. The trick to getting the nice blue in the background I learned was to use a slow shutter speed. The strobes positioned in rabbit ears (straight up above the camera pointed slightly down) will light up the subject and the fish in the foreground and then since it's very dark inside the hold, you just need to hold the camera relatively still while the shutter is still open capturing the ambient light for the blue background.

As we began the second phase of the workshop, I had to learn a whole new set of skills. Since we were now taking photos on the reef, there was a lot of ambient light and I had to learn how to deal with this light in my shots. The tip we learned from Alex in getting a good wide



MG_0763: Bedford Truck in hold 2 of the Thistlegorm (initial attempt, no blue background, no fish). 1/8th sec at f/8.0, ISO 640, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 10mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240

angle shot on a reef is to have a good subject in the foreground, something of interest in the background to give depth and have a nice blue color for the water. Getting the right color blue background took a little practice. I had been told by one of the participants to start my camera settings at 1/125th sec, F8.0 and ISO 200 and then adjust from there. That seemed to work for me as a good starting point but I learned another tip from another participant that really worked well for me. Meter the blue and then underexpose by about 1 stop. That tip got me closer to the blue I was looking for. In either case, these tips really are just starting points and what I found was that I needed to take a picture, look in the LCD, adjust the settings, and repeat until I had the right color. Once you like the blue, then you begin adjusting the strobe position and power to light the subject. A nice tip that I learned was the closer



IMG_0868-Edit: Bedford Truck (Julian's truck). 1/6th sec at f/8.0, ISO 640, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 10mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240



IMG_1430: 1/250th sec at f/14, ISO 200, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 11mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240



IMG_0974: Stern of the SS Thistlegorm. 1/60th sec at f/8.0, ISO 200, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 11mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240. Converted to B&W using Silver Efex.



IMG_1216-Edit: Soft Coral with model. 1/200th sec at f/13, ISO 200, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 10mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240



IMG_1244: 1/125th sec at f/13, ISO 200, Canon 7D, Tokina 10-17mm at 10mm, Nauticam Housing, 2x INON z240

you are to the subject, the closer to the camera you should position your strobes and the further away or larger the subject the more distance you want your strobes positioned from the camera.

One way to provide an interesting background is to use a model. In one of Alex's talk on the use of models he suggested that you should instruct your model to look at the subject (even if they are far away) because if the model doesn't appear interested in the subject, why would the viewer – makes sense! Models can appear in silhouette or be lit. If they are lit, it's important to make sure you get enough light from your strobes on the eyes inside the mask. I found this took a little practice. I would use one strobe to light the subject and another strobe to light the model.

Leveraging the sun in our photographs was another lesson in the workshop. Some of the more experienced photographers in the workshop referred

to the sun as the white ball of death which was to be avoided; I quickly learned what they meant. The challenge when taking pictures with the sun in full view is that in many cases, your picture ends up with a cyan halo around the white ball due to the sensor on your camera's inability to handle the dynamic range. To get nice sun rays, one trick is to position the subject so that it is partially obscuring the sun. Another trick is to move the camera so that the sun ball itself is not in the frame but just the rays appear. I played with these techniques and am happy with my initial results.

Overall, I really enjoyed my workshop vacation and improved my photography skills immensely over the week. I even learned things about my camera that will help me with my topside photography. I would highly recommend this type of workshop for anyone interested in improving their photography skills no matter what skill level

they are at. Of course, having as much face time as you need with a professional photographer such as Alex Mustard is a huge benefit but in addition, the experience of being with a number of other accomplished photographers who share their knowledge and provide tips is fantastic. I also found that I became more critical of my own photography as the week progressed. Photographs that I would have been very happy with just the week before were not that pleasing to me even mid-week and I was deleting them from my computer. I hope this article provided some insight into some of the techniques and tips that helped my wide angle photography, the benefits of this type of workshop and I encourage you to try it if you have an opportunity.

Andy Deitsch

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