

Honeymoon or Dive Vacation

by Michael Wicks

The words were still hanging over my head as I attempted to fall asleep. “This isn’t a dive vacation!” the words that my Amina, Amina, had just said to me. We were planning our honeymoon, and we wanted to go to a beach place where neither of us had gone to, and, Cozumel, the home of the drift dive and waters so clear that you’d swear you were topside not below the depths would be that place.

I knew diving on our honeymoon would be a touchy subject as my now wife was not a diver. She is, however, an avid snorkeler and on most occasions it would be me who would drag her out of the water at the end of the day. But how could I not dive in Cozumel? 11 Days and 10 nights in a diver’s paradise. So when asked how many dives I thought I was going to log on our honeymoon, four was a reasonable and rational number that came to mind. This statement elicited said declaration: “This isn’t a dive vacation.” As I drifted off to sleep I could hear Amina mumble from the den, “Wow the diving does look amazing there...” Oh the torture.

I resigned myself to 2 dive days, one early and one later in the vacation. There would be quite a bit

of snorkeling and when everything was said and done I did prefer to be in the water with my bride as her giddiness at seeing new creatures in the water did so make me happy.

After a red-eye in to Miami that continued on into Cozumel, we got hustled a bit at the airport. For those going to Cozumel, after getting your luggage and dive gear, go past all the workers in white shirts and badges to either your transportation or to the window where you buy transportation tickets. If you get snagged by one of the swarthy white shirted clad men you may get suckered into a timeshare sales pitch at some point. Not a bad thing, but better to go on your terms rather than theirs.

We booked our stay at the Cozumel Palace, an all-inclusive resort which of course included all libations as well. Even after a long red eye trip from Los Angeles we were quite amped and ready to schedule our activities. The Palace gives you credits that you can use towards excursions and spa days. We booked the typical activities; Massage for my birthday, honeymoon dinner, dolphin swim, Chichen Itza excursion and of course diving. For



Honeymoon cake, Canon G9 ©Amina MacLeod

those counting this would be my first dive of the trip.

We settled in for the evening with drinks in hand and a resort show for entertainment. In the morning I checked with the dive shop, and to be honest I was less than impressed. They had booked me on the 11 AM boat rather than the 8 AM. When asked why, they said that they couldn’t guarantee an 8 AM trip. When I asked where they typically went for the dives I got a blank stare.



Coral Formations – Canon Rebel xTi, 10-17mm lens Dual Ikelite DS125 strobes and Ikelite housing F8.0 Shutter 1/125 ISO 200

Needless to say I decided to cancel this trip and book with Deep Exposure dive operations. A very wise decision. They offered a snorkeling package for Amina so that she could join in.

The dive trip was scheduled for our 2nd day there and the boat picked us up right at the resort pier promptly at 8 AM. Very convenient. There were only 4 other divers on board,

one discover diver and one other snorkeler. We were accompanied by 3 dive masters. Not bad ratios. I was surprised by how long the trip took to get to our first dive destination: Palancar Reef.

Knowing that I would be drift diving I set up my camera rig for wide angle. Although I am drift certified I have never shot in drifts before so this would be something new. After some technical difficulties with my camera gear on the first dive I was able to settle in and enjoy the seascapes and creatures on the 2nd dive. Upon surfacing, Amina told me that she had been snorkeling with the captain and although it was a short stint in the water she enjoyed it immensely. She was able to swim with barracudas and play with turtles. The next dive site was Columbia reef where we were able to catch garden eels. There were also fish that when alerted would shoot into the sand head first as if it were butter. I spent my time trying to capture one of these illusive wonders but alas to no avail. They were much too fast and the dive had to continue on.

Heading below deck I caught one of the divemasters preparing what would be some of the best guacamole I've ever tasted. Lunch was quite tasty and no one went hungry. It was about an hour ride back to our hotel and I gathered all our equipment and bid the crew adieu, we jumped on to the pier and headed in. Later that evening I received a call confirming that I had in fact forgot my regulator and would need to come to the shop.



Hawksbill Turtle Grazing – Canon G9, no strobe,

This was not such an issue as it would give us the chance to explore downtown and would, of course, give me an excuse to sign up for my next dive. For those keeping track this would be my last dive of the trip. Or so I thought.

The next few days were filled with the rest of the excursions we had booked upon arrival. Chichen Itza was incredible but be prepared for a 3 hour trip there, temps in the 100's and 1000's of vendors trying to hawk their wares to you. The mantra of the trip became, "Almost free my friend".

After a short ferry trip to Playa Del Carmen we boarded a shuttle for an hour, to embark on a turtle encounter in a small town known as Akumal. Since we're new to the area we decided on the



Feather Duster Worms – Cropped - Canon Rebel xTi, 10-17mm lens Dual Ikelite DS125 strobes and Ikelite housing F8.0 Shutter 1/125 ISO 200

guided tour. Just one other family booked this trip besides us so it was very intimate and stress free excursion. We spent 40 minutes swimming with the loggerheads, watching them graze, come up for air and then graze again. They come to this small bay due to the lush underwater grass fields. After a healthy lunch Amina asked if we had time to go out again. This time it was unguided and we were able to locate a few of these sea creatures and hang with them for the rest of the afternoon. As with all good things it came to an end and I proceeded to drag Amina from the water, pruned but jubilant.

Chankanaab Park is an Eco-Archaeological

park for all things water. They offer dolphin and sea lion encounters, but our focus on this day would be the Manatees. Both Amina and I have been in awe of these creatures for as long as we could remember. The odd thing is this is the least expensive encounter at the park and the fee includes park entrance fees. We were able to get in the water and hold these massive animals as well as free feed them. Apparently these creatures will continue to eat most of their waking life and are extremely gentle considering that although on the small side, they weighed in at over 650 lbs. I can honestly say that you haven't really lived until you've placed your finger in the belly button of a Manatee.

Stingray Beach is another excursion that is a must when staying on Cozumel. Although you're bound to see rays anywhere you go in Cozumel water and this includes of the hotel reef area, there's nothing like getting in the water with 20-30 of these creatures at the same time. Stingray beach offers snorkeling with a guided interaction session where you can feed and handle the rays. Snorkeling with these animals is truly memorable. I had taken my G9 without strobes for the snorkeling as the water, at it's max would only be 18-20' deep. Although I was able to breath hold and get some shots on



Reef with Sea Fan - Canon Rebel xTi, 10-17mm lens Dual Ikelite DS125 strobes and Ikelite housing F8.0 Shutter 1/100 ISO 100

the bottom, I couldn't hold a candle to the guides ability. I truly believe that they're all part fish.

I could feel Amina squeezing my hand, as she always does when she gets excited in the water. But this was a very special moment because, although she has snorkeled with various fish and turtles in the past, she's never had close encounters underwater with rays.

As we were leaving the beach I



Sting Ray - Canon Rebel xTi, 10-17mm lens Dual Ikelite DS125 strobes and Ikelite housing F8.0 Shutter 1/200 ISO 200

asked the attendant if, by chance, they ever allowed divers in the park. She smiled and said "of course we just don't advertise it as much." Amina asked if she could do a discover dive as well. She was intrigued by being completely submersed with these animals she was still hesitant on the diving aspect. Again the answer from the attendant was an affirmative. Either way we were definitely coming back to dive and snorkel before we

disembarked from Cozumel. And for those keeping track, I was just able to get a 3rd dive into our honeymoon.

The next day on what was supposed to be final dive day, Amina decided it would be her final Spa day. I left her in our resort room and headed to the pier. I had booked with the same company, Deep Exposure, as I had with my first dive. This time on the boat there were only 2 other divers from Miami. One diver was

still shooting film in fact. On this trip we would dive Columbia Gardens and Torments reef. Again armed with my wide angle we descended on Columbia Gardens only to find very little current and lots of macro opportunities. Always the angst of an underwater photographer; Wrong lens at the wrong time.

It was still a great dive, however. Sharks, barracuda, rays and other creatures were bountiful. After a nice and lengthy surface interval we headed to Torments reef. Typically known for strong currents that can change directions at times this dive can provide spectacular scenery including huge barrel sponges, sea fans and a terrestrial sand dune that can be seen from the air. For my first encounter diving the 2nd largest barrier reef in the world I couldn't have really asked for more. Or could I?

Upon returning to the hotel I discovered that Amina had already made arrangement for both of us to dive Stingray beach. She was going to do her first open water discover dive amongst the Stingrays. She had completed some pool skills in CA but never got to the point of being in the open ocean. I was probably as excited as was she. It's not often you get to share this experience with a newbie, but even rarer with a loved one.

We made our way over to

Stingray Beach to meet up with the instructor that would be overseeing Amina's dive. An extremely laid back gentleman who used to work in the Red Sea as well as other areas. After some initial instruction and obligatory paperwork, we donned our gear and entered the water. First task was for Amina to demonstrate basics skills such as mask clearing. During this procedure a Sting Ray with a wingspan of about 1 meter swam between her and the instructor to check her out. I could feel her giddiness in the water.

Throughout the dive I could feel her glee and see her eyes beaming. Upon exiting the water she said "Ok I get it, I need to get certified." We flew back after 11 days and 10 nights of honeymooning and diving bliss. So to answer that original question, it's a honeymoon that also became a dive vacation. And as Amina still dreams of water and swimming with Mantas and Sting Rays I can safely say that most of our vacations will continue to be honeymoons and dive destinations.

Michael Wicks



Don't settle for 2nd best



Film - No Filter
No White Balance



Digital - No Filter
Manual WB



Magic Filter
Manual WB

Digital cameras have opened up new possibilities to underwater photographers. For available light photography manual white balance is an invaluable tool for restoring colours. But when you use it without a filter you are not making the most of the technique. You're doing all the hard work without reaping the full rewards.

These three photos are all taken of the same wreck in the Red Sea. The left hand image was taken on slide film, which rendered the scene completely blue. The middle image is taken with a digital SLR without a filter; using manual white balance. The white balance has brought out some of the colour of the wreck, but it has also sucked all the blue out of the water behind the wreck, making it almost grey. The right hand image is taken with the same digital camera and lens, but this time using an original Magic Filter. The filter attenuates blue light meaning that the colours of the wreck are brought out and it stands out from the background water, which is recorded as an accurate blue.

www.magic-filters.com

Guidelines for contributors

The response to UwP has been nothing short of fantastic. We are looking for interesting, well illustrated articles about underwater photography. We are looking for work from existing names but would also like to discover some of the new talent out there and that could be you! UwP is the perfect publication for you to increase your profile in the underwater photography community.

The type of articles we're looking for fall into five main categories:

Uw photo techniques - Balanced light, composition, etc

Locations - Photo friendly dive sites, countries or liveaboards

Subjects - Anything from whale sharks to nudibranchs in full detail

Equipment reviews - Detailed appraisals of the latest equipment

Personalities - Interviews/features about leading underwater photographers

**If you have an idea for an article,
contact me first before putting pen to paper.
E mail peter@uwpmag.com**

How to submit articles

To keep UwP simple and financially viable, we can only accept submissions by e mail and they need to be done in the following way:

1. The text should be saved as a TEXT file and attached to the e mail

2. Images must be attached to the e mail and they need to be 144dpi

Size - Maximum length 15cm i.e. horizontal pictures would be 15 cm wide and verticals would be 15cm.

File type - Save your image as a JPG file and set the compression to "Medium" quality. This should result in images no larger than about 120k which can be transmitted quickly. If we want larger sizes we will contact you.

3. Captions - **Each and every image MUST have full photographic details** including camera, housing, lens, lighting, film, aperture, shutter speed and exposure mode. These must also be copied and pasted into the body of the e mail.

Parting Shot

Following on from Mark Webster's 'Do we need depth?', I dug up this shot I did in April as part of a three-month photographic study on Cornish Rockpools. The majority of my work involves me staying dry and the rockpools provided the chance to get underwater shots while staying high and dry (often not so high). Having lived in Cornwall for three years, I was spoilt for choice on dive locations but it was the rockpools that really interested me. The species in rockpools go through daily struggles with predators, low oxygen and water level changes. Cornwall has over 300 miles of coastline to choose from, with exposed shores bearing the brunt of the Atlantic, to sheltered shores harbouring all manner of seaweeds and invertebrate life. One location in particular, the Helford, at low tide is a vast expanse of exposed shore with weeds and rocks holding some of the most biodiverse waters in the entire UK. Located in the mouth of the Helford estuary, it is truly a fantastic place to get photos above and below the water. Species like Cornish clingfish, Montague's crabs and beadlet anemones are not uncommon. I prefer to work with slow-moving subjects as it gives me time to compose the shot and experiment

with settings and exposure. With the blue sky I knew I wanted a split shot but had to find a willing subject. Blue skies are big favourite of mine as they provide a nice contrast with the clouds and the subject matter rather than a blown-out white background. The shot could have worked underwater but splits often add something to the image and show the best of both worlds. Cornwall's shores are full of life and this edible crab found nearby had the habit of running straight towards the dome port and myself! With the subject being only centimetres below the surface of the water I can make full use of natural light, which I find gives it a certain quality that strobe lighting just doesn't seem to have. Getting as close to the crab as possible meant that it was a prominent feature in the image. Intense sunlight can be a hindrance as most rockpool creatures shun it but it lights up the entire rockpool opening up an unseen world. With the small crevices a compact can be very handy for use in rockpools: otherwise when using a DSLR finding the larger rockpools leads to more success. Donning a wet suit and getting into the larger rockpools means that you can compose the image a lot easier and don't have to lift a heavy housing



which can be tiring after a few hours. You only have a few hours depending on what part of the shore line you work on; with the very furthest tips only being exposed for a short time, it's good to have an idea of where and

what on the shoreline you would like to capture.

Jack Perks

www.jackperksphotography.co.uk

Do you have an image which has a 'story within a story'?
If so we'd love to hear from you.

**E mail us and yours could be
the next "Parting shot".**

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