

The Professional Advantage

by Karen Stearns

Honing underwater photo skills is an ongoing process that can last a lifetime. One of the best ways to accelerate the process is to work with an on-site photo pro. And while some veteran shooters might scoff at the idea of taking advice from a resident expert, the benefits can be tangible, and dramatic improvements can be realized in relatively short order.

A photo pro can provide much more than souvenir images of your trip. Increasingly, dive resorts are hiring on-site, full-time pros to hold workshops, courses, and private lessons with guests. Working hands-on with a professional photographer on your next dive trip can help transform vacation snapshots into something you might actually hang on your wall, or even get published in a magazine.

A prime example of this trend is taking place at Wakatobi Dive Resort. Here, the world-renowned House Reef, which is just a short fin-kick from shore, proves the perfect real-world photo studio. Critters rare on most Indo-Pacific dives—pygmy seahorses, frogfish, crocodilefish, cuttlefish, and ghost pipefish—frequent the House Reef. Combine this location with the services of a full-time photo pro capable

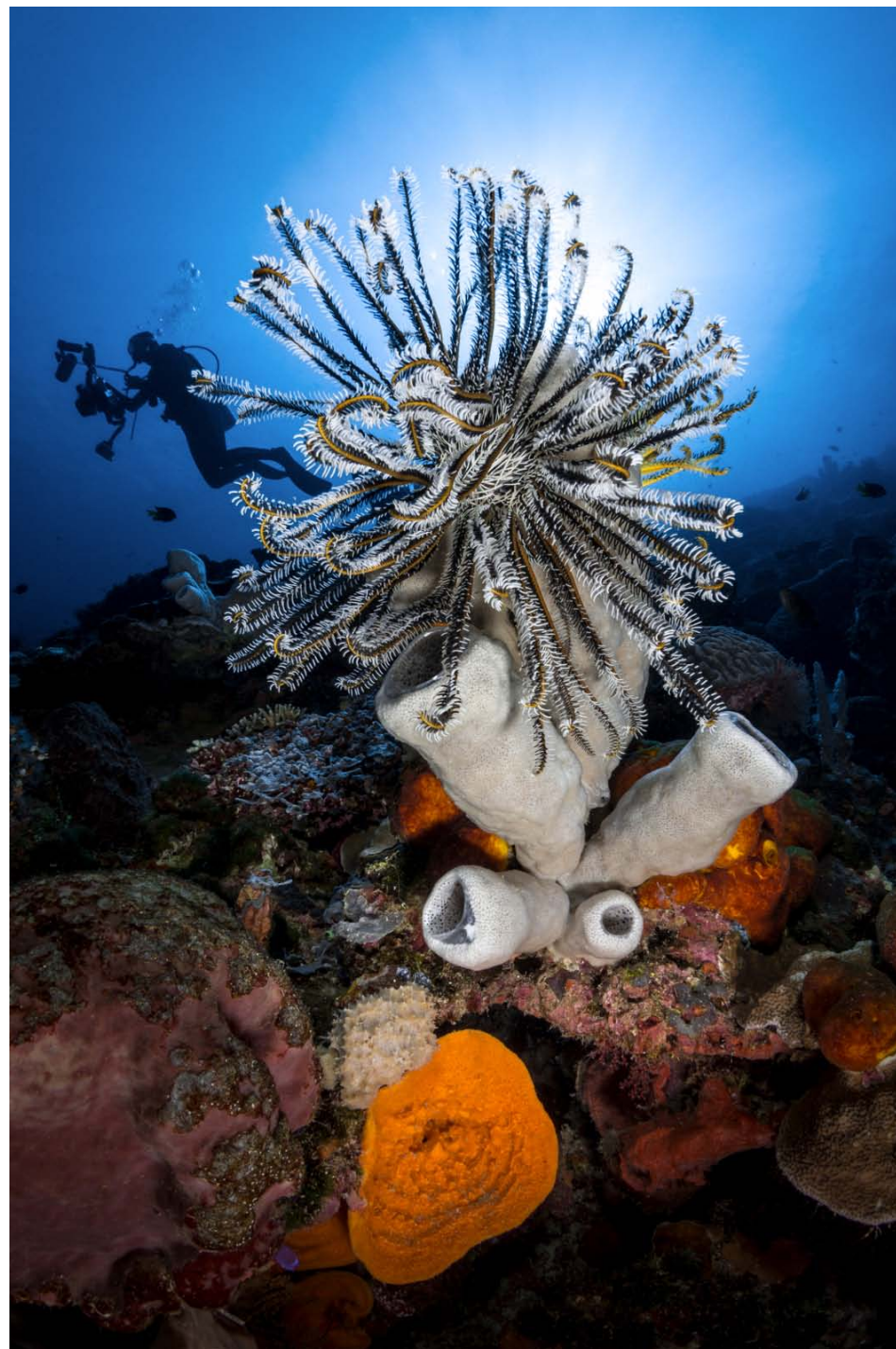
of providing personalized learning and advice and rapid improvements are not only possible, but the norm.

“The greatest improvement I see in my students is when they start thinking of a photograph even before they take it—from researching the subject to lighting choices, they plan the shot,” explains Marco Fierli, Wakatobi’s photo pro. “Everything that comes after tells me that they will soon find their own personal style.”

Marco offers formal courses and workshops aimed at a variety of ability levels from beginner to DSLR shooter. These programs can be effective, but it is often the one-on-one time where photographers can see the most improvement, he says. At times like these, Marco puts away the books to customize the lesson to the individual ability level and interest of the photographer, be it basic lighting metering or advanced techniques like snooting. “I tailor the existing material

© Marco Fierli

Canon 5DMKIII, Nauticam housing, Canon 16-35 II, 8.5” acrylic Nauticam dome port, 2 X INON Z240 strobes, Nauticam carbon arms system, Nauticam flash trigger





Engaging the expertise of a photo pro, even if just for a short period of time, can provide much more than souvenir images from your trip. Photo by Walt Stearns



“The most remarkable aspect of Marco’s teaching is his capacity for communicating effectively underwater while in the midst of taking and evaluating shots,” recalls Scott Friedman. Photo by Walt Stearns.



Photo workshop student, Scott Friedman, was able to hone his macro and super macro skills during a short workshop at Wakatobi. He captured this image of a Halimeda ghost pipefish working with Marco on Wakatobi’s House Reef. Canon 5D Mark II in Aquatica housing and Inon strobes. 100mm macro. F22. 1/160th. ISO200.

and schedules to the specific needs and goals of the guest,” he says. “I can follow the guest for the day, give explanatory briefings before and after each dive, and write photographic tips on my slate as we dive together.”

Before his trip to Wakatobi, Scott Friedman considered himself an “experienced amateur” underwater photographer, but felt a gap in his portfolio, specifically with super macro. “I’ve long wanted to have

the know-how for super macro, especially to capture a solid image of a pygmy seahorse or a ghost pipefish,” he says. “For several years, I’ve owned a MacroMate attachment for doing super macro, but for the life of me I couldn’t really figure out how to use it. Marco helped me immensely (and quickly) with these goals. Since I didn’t have manual focus gear with me, he was able to adapt his instruction so that I could

use a particular autofocus mode to accomplish what I wanted,” said Scott.

Scott spent a couple evenings in the classroom at Wakatobi as Marco reviewed supermacro techniques. Each following day, he would put the gained knowledge to the test during in-water instruction. “The most remarkable aspect of Marco’s teaching is his capacity for communicating effectively underwater while in the midst of taking and evaluating shots,” recalls Scott. “There was a perfect combination of hand signals, a writing tablet, demonstration, and the occasional verbal exclamation into his regulator that somehow makes it to the student’s ears.”

Thanks to Marco’s guidance, Scott saw dramatic improvements in his images over the course of his stay at Wakatobi. And equally as important, he says, was the fact that he made these improvements while thoroughly enjoying the trip itself. As he puts it, “at Wakatobi, it’s simply a lot of fun to dive and take photos.”

Karen Stearns

www.wakatobi.com



Marco Fierli joined the team at Wakatobi in 2011. As an accomplished underwater photographer he shares his talents through private sessions and workshops based on individual need and experience.

See more of Marco’s images on his personal website.

www.marcof8.com

For more information or to arrange a session with Marco during your stay send an email

office@wakatobi.com

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