



Tradition, culture & vibrant reefs

Tawali

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ANDREY BIZYUKIN

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Cuttlefish; Spanish dancer; Black Jack aircraft from WWII; Nudibranch



After that ordeal, it was a relief to arrive in Port Moresby—the capitol of our dream destination—and take our first deep breaths of warm and moist tropical air. Looking around, we noticed that everyone except us were very dark-skinned, yet had what appeared to us to be distinct Russian features—the same noses, eyes, lips and expressions as some of our relatives and friends, just with more curly hair and darker skin. The sense of kinship made us feel right at home.

Papua New Guinea is the largest island in the world, second only to Greenland, and the Europeans discovered it in 1526—if

you can even say that about an island which was already inhabited. In any case, it is the Spaniard, Don Jorge de Meneses, who is credited with setting the first European foot on these amazing lands. Here, he met the Melanesian Aborigines and named

“You want to go to Papua New Guinea?” The question was posed with marked surprise during our visit to the Australian Embassy, which looks after the interests of Papua New Guinea in our country (Russia). “You’ll need at least one and a half



Nudibranch mounts a tunicate

months to get through all the paper work and procedures required to obtain a visa to Papua New Guinea. Why have you already bought air tickets? We don’t think that it is possible to get all the formalities sorted out in time

for your intended departure.” Naturally, we were aghast with such a reception from an official representative who should really be happily promoting the destination, but that didn’t stop us. Being possessed of a sense of camaraderie with the great travellers and explorers

of the past and a persistence only Olympic champions share, we managed to cut through all the red tape and bureaucratic obstacles to, by the end of it all, make it to Papua New Guinea on time.

“... in human life, we have romanticism. It is this that brings to humankind God’s will for us to adventure to the other side of commonness. This is the inspiration of the human soul that pushes individuals to great achievements.”
— Fridtjof Nansen



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NICK IVANOV

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the island after their curly hair. Its present name, Papua, comes from the Melanesian language in which *papuwah* means curly-headed. Much water has passed under the bridge since the day of Jorge de Meneses, but scientists still refer to Papua New Guinea as a garden of Eden. There are more than 11,000 species of plants, 600 species of birds, 400 species of amphibians and about 100 known species of mammals.

As recently as 2005, scientists venturing into the jungle—which is still completely isolated from the rest of the world—found 20 new species of amphibians, four new species of butterfly and five new species of palm trees. The researchers also found a new rhododendron with huge flowers, an unique species of marsupial (a golden tree kangaroo), a long nosed echidna, and rediscovered Berlepsch's six-wired bird of paradise, which was believed to be extinct. It is the real "lost world" of Arthur Conan Doyle.

ANDREY BIZYUKIN



There are no species of ape and monkey on the island but the biodiversity is profound and still intact.

More than a thousand Papua-Melanesian tribes speaking 800 local languages live here, too. It was actually in Papua New Guinea that, more than 10,000 years ago, land was first cultivated. Long before the ancestors of the present day

Europeans took to agriculture, Papuans knew how to grow taro roots with which they are still cooking the local dish *Mu-mu*.

The capitol of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, is, according to statistics on crime, one of the three most dangerous cities in the world. But for us, who survive the daily life of Moscow, nothing seems out of the ordinary.

The abundance of Papuans with stylish multicoloured wardrobes and the appearance of having bloody mouths (like they have just drunk blood)



Tawali

NICK IVANOV

LEFT TO RIGHT: Exotic tribal ritual, school of Barracuda, detail close-up of Spotty shark (inset)... Great biodiversity is everywhere, underwater and on land

gave this marvellous place a very exotic tone. But Papuans are very friendly. From children to old people, they favour chewing betel-nuts, which is lightly narcotic stimulant causing them to salivate, which causes this appalling red colouration.

The first Russian to make a landing on the coast of Papua New Guinea was Nikolay Mikluho-Maklay who arrived aboard the vessel *Vityas* in 1870. Prior to his trip to Papua, he worked as a marine biologist in the Red Sea where he conducted research on corals, sponges and sharks. And like many modern-day divers who often go to the Red Sea, he came to a point where he would like to see something different. So, he decided to set out on a new adventure

heading an expedition to what was then the most distant point from modern civilisation—Papua New Guinea.

This Russian traveller, who had curly hair himself, was fascinated with the Papuan land and the Papuan people from the moment he first set foot on shore. "Papuan's caresses are very different," Maklay noted after his first night with a black island woman.

Maklay wrote in his field notebook: "The Papuan women have smooth skin with a light-brown hue. Their hair is thick and



Eye of a shark

WOLFF KOEHLER

black from nature. Their eye-lashes are long and beautifully curved. Breasts of young girls are conical in shape

and stay small and pointed until their first breast feeding, and their buttocks are very well developed. The men like it very much if their wives wriggle their back parts as they walk in such way that one of buttocks should move to a side exactly with each step.



PNG saw some heavy battles during WW2. Diver explores the wreck of what seems to be Japanese Zero fighter plane



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Anemonefish are usually aggressively defensive about their host anomone but this one doesn't seem to mind the presence of commensal shrimp (probably *Periclemenes Holthuisi*) which may act as a cleaner

"Here is some Russian spirit."

Not surprisingly, the Papuans actually tried to kill the Russian traveller at first, but after a while, they took to him. He decided to help the Papuans by providing medical treatment, offering the Papuans metal objects and giving useful advice. According to tales passed down through the generations, Maklay told the Papuan forefathers that stone axes were not sharp, but blunt, and were best thrown away into the forest. Replacing the stone tools, Maklay gave them iron knives and axes. He was the white Papuan who came to be known as the "Tamo-russ", the Russian, or "Karran-tamo", the man from the moon.

This happy travelling tale of Mikluho Maklay reflects how the semblance between Russians and Papuans still benefits Russian travellers in Papua New Guinea today. It is in stark contrast to some rather unfortunate events that happened to less fortunate missionaries in the past.

Some old Papuans still talk about the tale of "the inedible feet of white people". In the beginning, Papuans met cordially with missionaries, but later, they decided to kill them. Missionaries were stabbed to death with spears and eaten in order for the Papuans to take over their force, wisdom and power. It was the first time that Papuans, who



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Big eye squirrel fish poses in front of a backdrop of ...how many nudibranchs are there? We still spot new ones in this image

never used shoes, cooked white people. But the Papuans didn't remove the white people's shoes first. Most parts of the cooked white people seemed tasty enough—except their feet. The Papuans couldn't chew their way through the shoes. It was just not possible. Later, the older and wiser Papuans taught the younger ones how to prepare white people in a tasty way.

Crab-eye goby illustrates how confusing or intimidating false eyespots can be



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The journey to Tawali

It took just one hour with a small Fokker commuter plane completely filled with divers mixed with Papuans, to take us to Alotau on the eastern part of Papua New Guinea. Another one and half hours of land transport followed taking us out on dirt roads across the jungle on shaky, one-way bridges over wild rivers and past fragile aborigine houses, lit by open fires and kerosene lamps.

We moved still further into the countryside. We then arrived at a landing stage on a deserted beach below the dense jungle and were taken aboard our next form of transport. Six miles more on the night sea and finally we moored in a cosy bay of Tawali. The



Spirit of Nuigini dive safari boat operates out of the Tawali resort



Cover image © Magnus Lundgren

The first edition of Wetpixel Quarterly is nothing less than stunning!

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P.S. And the above is no B.S.

Stan Waterman

Pioneer underwater film producer and photographer



All images above ©Norbert Wu

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Close but not too close, please. An epaulette shark keeps an wary eye on the approaching diver



Yellow sponges light up the reef

ANDREY BIZYUKIN

Tawali underworld

It is finally time for our first dive: We take a giant stride off the side step of the boat and immerse ourselves in the deep blue unknown sea around us.

Visibility is about 20 meters. We were told us that normal visibility should be around 30 meters.

We descended along rocks covered with huge sponges in all shapes and sizes. It is not necessary to drop down into the alluring abyss—all the underwater attractions are found in depths shallower than 40 meters.

There are plenty of canyons and underwater caves between the reefs and rocks. Corals, sponges and fishes like

The mouth of a giant clam looks like an abstract artwork



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owners of this place—the two famous underwater photographers, Bob Hollis and Rob Vanderloos, came out to greet us.

“*Tawali* means ‘reef’ in the local language,” they started to explain. “We came here a few years ago. It was a quiet bay set in a framework of limestone rocks mixed with basalts covered by primordial jungle. We were instantly charmed by the beauty of this amazing place. And when we dived here, we realised, being underwater photographers, that we had stumbled across a rare treasure. The biodiversity, concentration and size of the underwater life and animals were unique and astounding. We had not seen such miracles anywhere else. That was why we decided to build our hotel exactly on this spot, even if it is so remote, far from civilization.”

Two hundred people from the local villages worked a full year to build this miracle of wooden architecture. Houses on poles rise out of the tropical bush. Local colouring and creative components of the Papuan spirit and the local tribes are reflected abundantly in the magical wooden sculptures. There are huge sea crocodiles, wooden masks and canoes. And the tribes’

totems on the columns protect Tawali’s guests.

There is a spacious hall for guests, pictures on the walls, and all the rooms are equipped with all the modern conveniences as well as cosy balconies, which overlook the peaceful bay. There is even a satellite dish and Wi-Fi for connecting to the outer world if you so desire. It is like a white man’s dream of a tropical paradise for which reason Rob decided to become a Papua New Guinea citizen and completely devoted himself to Tawali.

Diving

Diving in Tawali takes place from the comfortable day boat *Tawali Explorer*, which is equipped with a big dive deck six meters wide. It is a genuine ocean-

going vessel, fast and steady on the ocean swells. We ordered Nitrox fills for our cylinders and a big tank of fresh water for our underwater cameras. Diving is excellent everywhere in the bay, in the open ocean, in the strong currents as well as close by the local rocks where you can find a virtual fish soup of sharks.

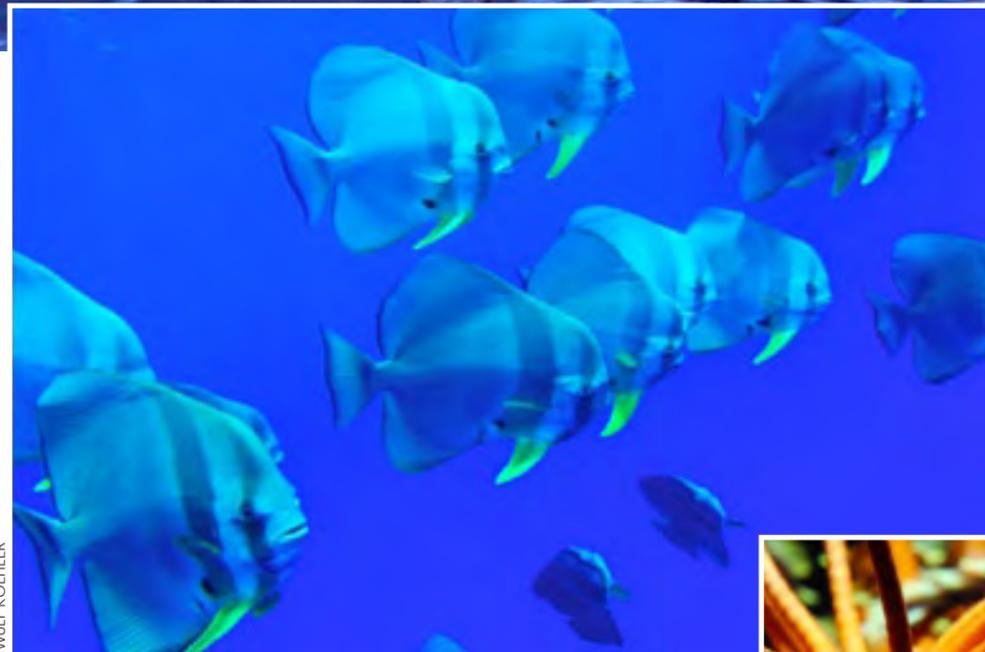


Down “ Luxurious daily dive boat Tawali ”





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to hide there. We blind them with our bright LED torches while taking our first shots.

It was really spectacular to get into one of the caves and watch from the inside how the sun rays played with the light and shadows around the cave entrance.

We appreciated the splendid organization of the diving and the extra attention given to the underwater photographers from the first day.

The dive guides not only followed us discretely, but they also pointed out to us the most interesting habitants of the sea. We were given the

optimal opportunities to focus on exposure and picture composition. This enhanced our photographic effectiveness on each dive many times over.

I don't recall any other trip where it was possible to take so many great shots. All the photographers



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were delighted with the photographs they took and what they saw on their dives.

The many woes that have affected coral reefs in other parts of the world seem not to have affected Papua New Guinea yet. In Tawali, it seems appropriate not to speak just of coral gardens but of coral jungles. "There is a jungle both above and below the surface," was the spontaneous delightful comment of my dive buddy. It is not like a "fish soup" either, but more like a "fish stew".

It is a common belief that Papua New Guinea is a paradise for macro photographers. There is an abundance of nudibranchs and worms of every imaginable colour and size, brightly coloured prawns in rainbow drapes, pygmy sea horses, tiny gobies, crawfish and many other charming creatures many of which are species new to science.

But Tawali is also the place for connoisseurs of big pelagics. You can dive in the strong currents and feed sharks in open seas—just don't forget to mount your wide-angle lense.

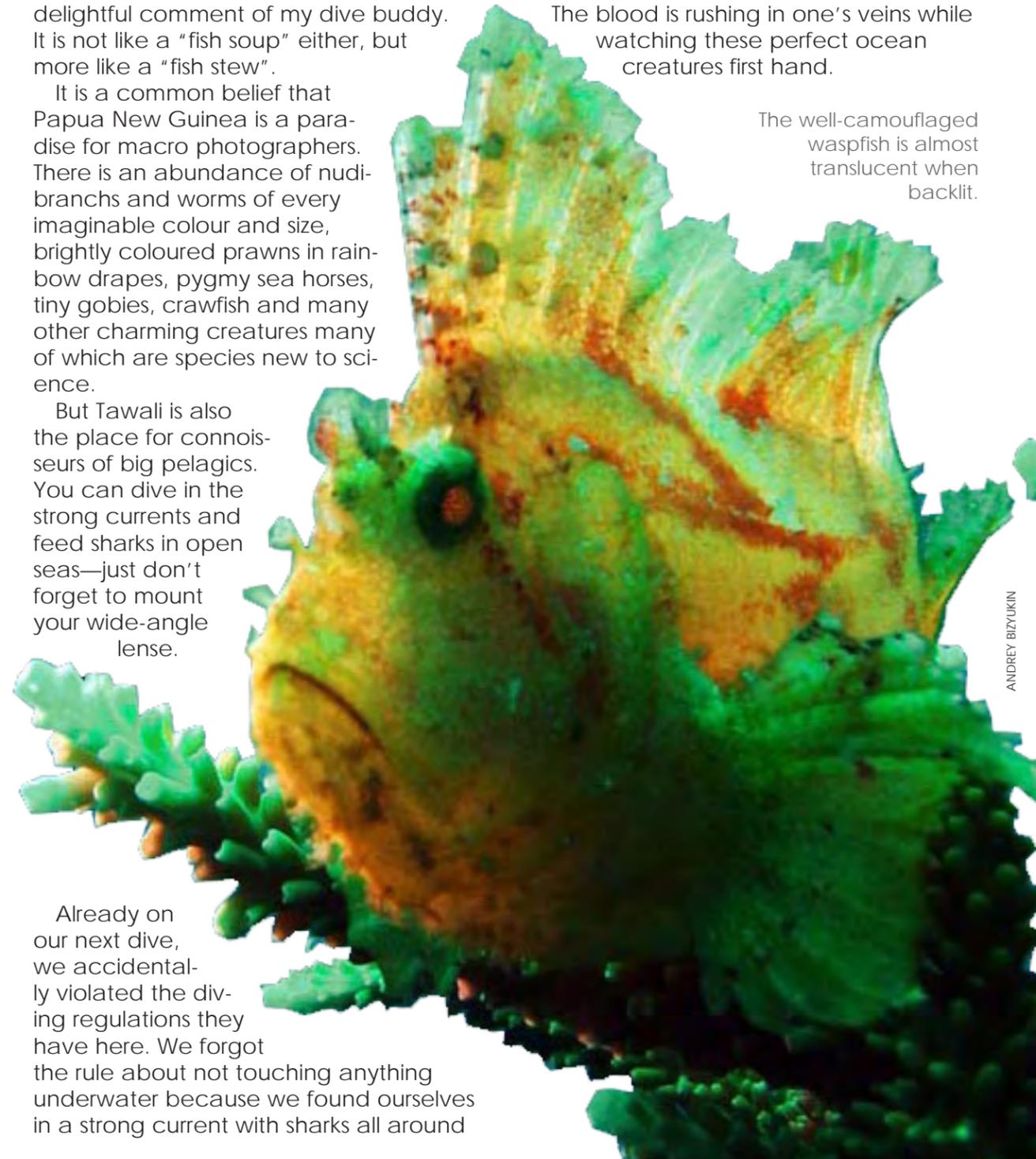
Already on our next dive, we accidentally violated the diving regulations they have here. We forgot the rule about not touching anything underwater because we found ourselves in a strong current with sharks all around

us and had little choice than to cling onto a head of corals while we, in a mixture of horror and exhilaration, watched the sharks in a feeding frenzy.

Our adrenaline levels went off the charts, and all the problems in the world were suddenly put into a new and different perspective. There is nothing like a little excitement to clear your mind.

The blood is rushing in one's veins while watching these perfect ocean creatures first hand.

The well-camouflaged waspfish is almost translucent when backlit.



ANDREY BIZYUKIN

Papua's seas are full of unique life. LEFT TO RIGHT: wild dolphin; school of batfish; a blenny peeks out from inside a featherstar (inset);

NEXT PAGE: View of a magical sunset from the Tawali observation deck; Colourful nudibranch and tiny shrimp; Guests congregate on the observation deck (inset)

“We got food from boiled taro. I asked: Do local people use special tapir (Papua New Guinea plates) for human meat. They said no. They told me that human meat was boiled in the usual pots and given to guests in the same tapirs. And only because they offered me no meat today, was I sure that this was not human”
—Nikolay Mikluho-Maklay

It was an unique experience that will stay with us forever. Diving with sharks is the pinnacle of diving, and we were happy to participate in this underwater show in the Papuan sea.

Bob and Rob told us that one famous photographer from National Geographic called Tawali one of the best dive sites of the world, and he did most of his shots just at one dive site less than 15 minutes from the hotel. Therefore, the next day we decided to head for this “famous” dive-site, which was close to a cracked rock.

The underwater landscape was made up of rocks that had rolled down on a shallow sunlit plateau with a vertical reef wall divided by canyons. Only half an hour into the dive we came across a plethora of different forms of



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silver



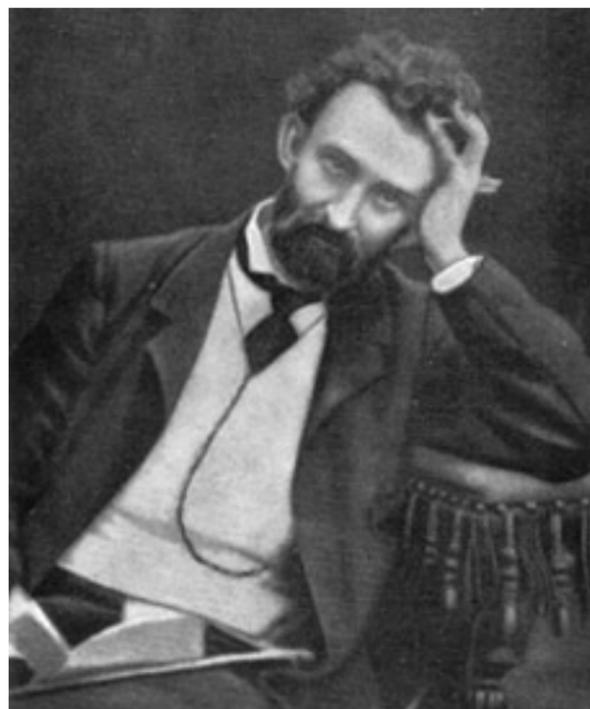
cinema of dreams



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Nikolay Miklukho-Maklay (1846-1888) first came to Papua New Guinea in 1871 and he returned to New Guinea island four more times. His ethnographic and anthropological experiment was unique for the time. Even now some people of the Bay of Austrolabe on Maklay Coast use Russian words such as *topor* (axe)!



underwater landscapes and unique photo subjects ranging from macro to wide angle.

We saw nudibranchs, turtles, a school of barracudas, huge groupers, fascinating anemones, grottos and canyons, fire corals, fans and the biggest gorgonia I have ever seen, about five meters in diameter. This was sheer and undiluted pleasure.

What places Tawali in a league of its own is the closeness and availability of so many astounding dive sites, which will satisfy the ambitions of even the most demanding diver. Here, the photographer will find both the understanding of the photographer's requirements and the advantage of a comfortable hotel combined with a good safari boat. There is no need to spend all your time, day and night, out on a stormy sea. All the various dive sites are within comfortable reach with a day boat. And in the evening, after an exciting dive day, it is good to have a rest on land, review your shots and discuss tomorrow's plans in the comfort of a 5-star hotel located in a jungle on the edge of civilization.

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Tawali



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FAR LEFT AND ABOVE: Skull caves

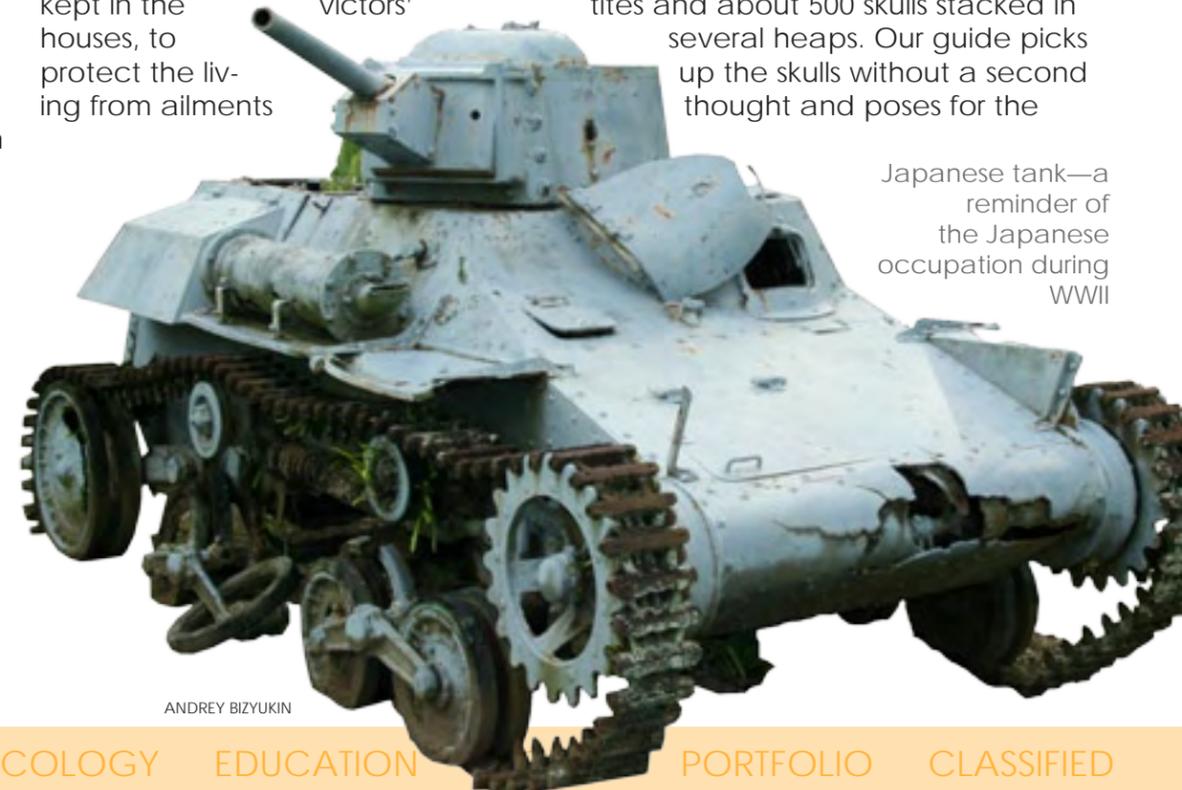
The jungle

To come to Papua New Guinea and not visit the jungle would be like just lying on the sofa and watching an adventure channel on TV. Surely we had to go into the real thing and see the jungle life and people with our own eyes.

Since the beginning of time, Papuans were cannibals and fought to get human meat for cooking. Skulls of killed and eaten enemies were kept in the victors' houses, to protect the living from ailments

and disasters. Cannibalism was outlawed by the government about one hundred years ago. Although, from time to time, some travellers who are just a little too adventurous or brave for their own good, disappear in the local mountains. But incidences like these are quite rare.

Jungle inhabitants now hide skulls in caves, and for 30 kina, you can visit one of these caves close to Tawali. It is a huge dark cavern with stalactites and about 500 skulls stacked in several heaps. Our guide picks up the skulls without a second thought and poses for the



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Japanese tank—a reminder of the Japanese occupation during WWII



The dive boats offer comfortable rides and spacious dive platforms

Contrasts meet. The delicate structure of a tunicate versus the brute muscular power of a patrolling reef shark

Welcome to the beautiful Tawali world!

A true mood-enhancer. Pod of playful wild dolphins adds to the local bright and cheery hospitality

camera as if there was nothing to it. Some of the skulls have holes testifying to the sudden and brutal death of the previous owner. A blunt force trauma is the term I think is used for this type of death in modern forensics.

The guide tells us that cannibalism is already history, but local people still discretely remove skulls and take them back to their houses. Old ways die hard, and apparently some traditions still exist. They do it to find protection against all sorts of disasters, protection in the remains of enemies killed by their courageous ancestors perhaps hundreds of years ago.

After a couple of days of very delightful diving, we sat on the porch

with Bob Hollis and Rob Vanderloos enjoying the vista of a fiery sunset, comfortably seated with a glass of Australian wine in hand, and watching

“The Papuans are staying close to my partly destroyed shack, fearing ‘Tamo-russ’ (Russian people) ... they call to me from afar their last ‘Emme-me’ and ‘E-aba-e’; and when the clipper moves further away, the beating of the ‘barum’ (big drum), informs the villagers that the man from the moon has left Papua” — Nikolay Mikluho-Maklay

the Southern Cross rise up on the night sky. Bob told us about his big plans to open a facility for technical diving and rebreather classes, which would be the first on Papua New Guinea. But first of all, they were going to pay special

attention to getting the best underwater photographers of the world here, which is why he is going to start providing the servicing of underwater housings in Tawali.

We came out of the jungle back to the sea. A big group of about 30 dolphins came to meet us. It seemed like they were very enthusiastic and welcoming and wanted to see us off. We took our last shots and prepared ourselves mentally for our long journey back to civilization on the opposite side of the planet, which now lies ahead of us. It is time to rush to the aircraft. But the dolphins don't have to be in a hurry; they can play endlessly in the wonderful coastal waters off Tawali.

If you are coming this way and visit

Tawali, you will probably be pleased to know that Papua New Guinea airlines permit divers an extra 15kg in luggage. But at the same time, they will probably cancel a flight or remove your booking for at least one leg of the journey, and for an indefinite time, lose your luggage.

But don't get too worried about these trivialities. A journey to Papua New Guinea is a great adventure, which leaves nobody indifferent. It is better to take these small problems in stride than to forsake what is possibly one of the few remaining opportunities to dive in a magical underwater world in one of last frontiers between truly wild nature and modern civilization, which seems to be destroying everything. You won't regret it, and you will never forget this romantic journey. ■



fact file

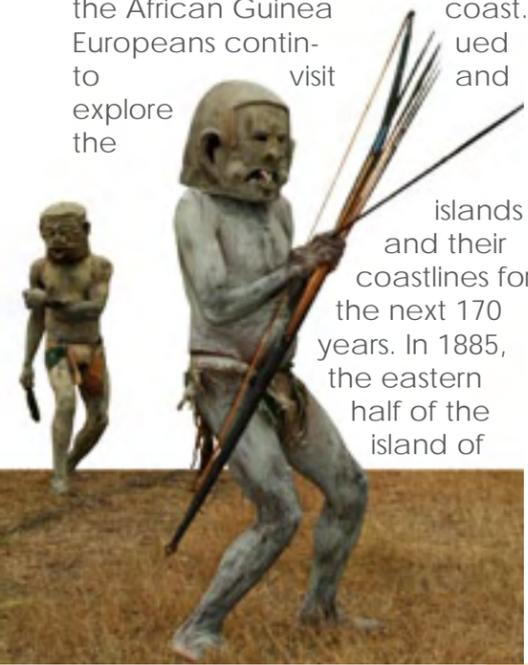


Tawali



SOURCE: US STATE DEPT & WORLD FACT BOOK AT WWW.CIA.GOV

History Archeologists have found evidence that indicates the arrival of humans on New Guinea about 60,000 years ago, most likely by sea from Southeast Asia during an ice age when distances between islands was shorter. Most likely, the first Europeans to site New Guinea were Spanish and Portuguese navigators sailing in the South Pacific in the early 16th century. Don Jorge de Meneses accidentally found the main island in 1526-27. He is credited with naming it "Papua," after a Malay term for the curly hair of the Melanesians. In 1545, a Spaniard, Íñigo Ortiz de Retes, applied the term "New Guinea" to the island because he thought the islands' people looked similar to those found on the African Guinea coast. Europeans continued to explore the islands and their coastlines for the next 170 years. In 1885, the eastern half of the island of



New Guinea which is the second largest in the world, was divided between the UK (south) and Germany (north). The UK's area was transferred to Australia in 1902. In World War I, Australia occupied the northern region and continued to administer the combined areas until independence in 1975. In 1997, some 20,000 lives were claimed by the end of a nine-year secessionist revolt on the island of Bougainville. Government: constitutional parliamentary democracy with legal system based on English common law; PNG has not accepted compulsory ICJ jurisdiction. Capital: Port Moresby

Geography PNG is made up of a group of islands in Oceania. It includes the eastern half of the island of New Guinea east of Indonesia, between the South Pacific Ocean and the Coral Sea. It shares the island of New Guinea with Indonesia and has one of the world's largest swamps along the southwest coast. Its area is slightly larger than California. Coordinates: 6 00 S, 147 00 E. Coastline: 5,152 km. Terrain: mostly mountainous with rolling foothills and coastal lowlands. Lowest point: Pacific Ocean 0 m. Highest point: Mount Wilhelm 4,509 m

Climate tropical; northwest monsoon takes place in December to March; southeast monsoon

takes place in May to October; there are slight seasonal temperature variations. Natural hazards: active volcanoes; PNG is situated along the Pacific "Ring of Fire"; frequent and sometimes severe earthquakes; mud slides; tsunamis.

Environmental issues deforestation of rainforests as a result of growing commercial demand for tropical timber; pollution from mining; severe drought. PNG is party to the following agreements: Antarctic Treaty, Biodiversity, Climate Change, Climate Change-Kyoto Protocol, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Dumping, Ozone Layer Protection, Ship Pollution, Tropical Timber 83, Tropical Timber 94, Wetlands

Economy Papua New Guinea has an abundance of natural resources, but rugged terrain and the high cost of developing infrastructure has hampered development. 85% of the population practice agriculture subsistence living. Mineral deposits provide almost two-thirds of export earnings. That includes copper, gold, and oil. The government of Prime Minister SOMARE, the first prime minister ever to serve a full five-year term, occupies itself with remaining in power. While it has brought stability to the national budget mainly through expenditure control, the

government relaxed spending constraints in 2006 and 2007 as elections approached. Challenges facing the government include regaining investor confidence, restoring integrity to state institutions, promoting economic efficiency by privatizing moribund state institutions, and balancing relations with its former colonial ruler, Australia. There is also a worsening HIV/AIDS epidemic and chronic issues in law and order and land tenure. More than \$300 million in aid will come from Australia in FY07/08. This accounts for nearly 20% of the national budget. Natural resources: gold, copper, silver, natural gas, timber, oil, fisheries. Agriculture: coffee, cocoa, copra, palm kernels, tea, sugar, rubber, sweet potatoes, fruit, vegetables, vanilla; shell fish, poultry, pork. Industries: copra crushing, palm oil processing, plywood production, wood chip production; mining of gold, silver, and copper; crude oil production, petroleum refining; construction, tourism.

Population 5,795,887 (July 2007 est.). Below poverty: 37% (2002 est.). Ethnic groups: Melanesian, Papuan, Negrito, Micronesian, Polynesian. Religions: Roman Catholic 22%, Lutheran 16%, Presbyterian/Methodist/London Mis-

sionary Society 8%, Anglican 5%, Evangelical Alliance 4%, Seventh-Day Adventist 1%, other Protestant religions 10%, indigenous beliefs 34%. Internet users: 110,000 (2006)

Languages Melanesian Pidgin serves as the lingua franca, English spoken by 1%-2%, Motu spoken in Papua region. There are 820 indigenous languages spoken in PNG, which is over one-tenth of the world's total.

Telephone services are not widely available; fixed-line and mobile-cellular telephone density is less than 3 telephones per 100

Health Very high degree of risk of food or waterborne diseases such as bacterial and protozoal diarrhoea, hepatitis A and typhoid fever. Vector borne diseases such as dengue fever and malaria are high risks in some locations (2007)

Decompression Chamber Melanesian Hyperbaric Services P. O. Box 111, Jacksons Airport Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea Emergencies: 6930305 or 6931202 (ISDC: 675) peter@walindi.com

Web Sites PNG Tourism www.png-tourism.com About PNG on Lonely Planet www.lonelyplanet.com

RIGHT: Location of Papua New Guinea on world map

FAR RIGHT: Map of Papua New Guinea and its islands



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mediterranean



WOLFGANG POLZER

Text by Harald Apelt
Photos by Harald Apelt & Wolfgang Pölzer

It was not a “big hello” ... There were no red carpets, and when the new sovereign of the principedom of Elba entered his island at the island-capital of Portoferraio, most of the 10,000 inhabitants of Elba didn’t take any notice of this historical date. The new sovereign was a Frenchman facing his new future on this wonderful green island nestled off the Italian coastline. It was a Tuesday afternoon on the 3rd of May, 1814, when Napoleon I Bonaparte, former emperor of France, reached Elba upon an English frigate and set his first steps on the island.

Following the treaty of Fontainebleau, the French emperor was exiled to Elba after his forced abdication on the 2nd of April, 1814. No longer a big wig in Europe anymore, he

now had to be satisfied with being a small Bonaparte for the rest of his life on one of the loveliest islands in the Mediterranean. He was allowed to keep his title of “Emperor” and to keep a personal guard of 600 men. Finally, he received an annual pension of two million francs. Although he was nominally the sovereign of Elba, the island was watched (more or less) by British naval patrols.

Well, most of us know how the story ends—Napoleon returned to Paris after only ten months of restless “holidays” away from international policy and battlefields. He had another 100 days at the head of his army until he finally lost his last battle at Waterloo on June 18th, 1815. This time, in October 1815, he was exiled to the not half as nice

Italy's Elba

About Napoleon & Sunfishes

PEARLS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: PORTO AZZURRO, ISOLA D'ELBA, ITALY

Porto Azzurro is on the south eastern edge of the third biggest Italian island, Elba. It is the first destination in our *Pearls of the Mediterranean* series, upon which we would like your eyes to feast. Elba is only about 10 kilometres off from the coast of Italy and is the biggest island of the Tuscan archipelago. Although the island thrives on tourism nowadays, the small seaports on its 150 kilometres of coastline are not yet over-run by mass tourism. Porto Azzurro—the blue harbour—is the pearl of this island.



WOLFGANG POLZER

Porto Azzurro

pearls of the mediterranean

Business as always, a fisherman is repairing his nets



Ria Marina, a picturesque village in the north of Elba

Elba

under King Philipp III, the fortress, San Giacomo di Longone, which was placed on a protruding peninsula of land, has overlooked the harbour and Barbarossa Bay. This wonderful building, unfortunately, is not often visited these days because it is used as a national prison.

Markus' dive center is the only building at Barbarossa Beach. He owns a small pier, which is the starting point for all the daily dive expeditions on the two full metal diving boats, the *Matteo Sandro* and the *Sisto*.

Both boats are specially constructed for diving. The flagship *Matteo Sandro*, at 13.5 metres in length, is a fully equipped and quite comfortable vessel with a



island of St. Helena in the south Atlantic, where he died only six years later.

Maybe his life would have taken a better turn if he had been more interested in the beauty of the island of his first exile. Certainly, Napoleon Bonaparte was not really interested in seamanship, and of course, he didn't know anything about diving. This is probably the reason why the resigned emperor saw only half of Elba's paradise!

Omnisub Dive Center

Markus Schempp is a German dive instructor and the owner of Omnisub Dive Center at Porto Azzurro. He was not exiled to Elba but discovered this place with his Croatian wife, Mirjana, more than ten years ago. They decided to stay here in order to begin a new life with their dive center.

Since then, Markus and Mirjana have learned to



WOLFGANG POLZER

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anything else too heavy in the diving business, requiring too much muscle power to be burdened by in the heat of a typical Italian summer. speak fluent Italian, and Markus has become a very keen driver of his "Ape"—an ugly little three-wheeled mixture of a "cabin-motorcycle-van-car". This vehicle is the modern Italian replacement for the donkey. It really has nothing to do with apes, but with busy bees, which is what the Italian word "ape" means. It is fun driving an "Ape", even if you are not transporting dive-tanks, weight belts or



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Markus' dive center is located at the Barbarossa Bay just 15 minutes walking distance from Porto Azzurro harbour. It is a nice walk, which everyone who visits this picturesque seaport should do.

Porto Azzurro, thus named in 1947, was called Porto Longone in former times. Since its days of Spanish rule

sundeck for "apres dive" sun bathing and enough space for groups of divers on the short daily diving trips.

The *Sisto* is about 3.5 metres shorter and has space for ten divers. It is mostly used by diving groups or dive clubs. With this boat, they can customize their individual daily diving plans beyond the regular diving schedules.

Both boats have a power

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pearls of the mediterranean



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compressor on board, as well as weight belts and dive tanks. No diver likes to carry these items before and after a dive. With *Sisto*, this equipment can stay on board for the duration of your diving vacation.

Diving

All the dive sites

are close to the coastline, so that the longest ride to a dive spot takes just a little more than 40 minutes. The rocky coastline of the island continues into the deep blue under the surface. Most of the dive spots are between 15 and 40 metres depth and have mostly good visibility of

20 to

40 metres. The good vis allows for a fantastic view of the diverse topography of these Mediterranean dive sites.

Canyons and caverns, fields of big rocks and breath-taking wall diving—my favourite spot for night dives—offer quite a lot of adventures, even for keen divers. Sea fans and colour changing red and yellow corals can be seen continuously. Morays, conger eels, spiny lobsters, octopus, baracudas and even big groupers can be found by the Omnisub divers on their daily diving trips.

Sometimes, during the recent unusually hot summers of the Mediterranean, big populations of nettle jellyfishes have angered

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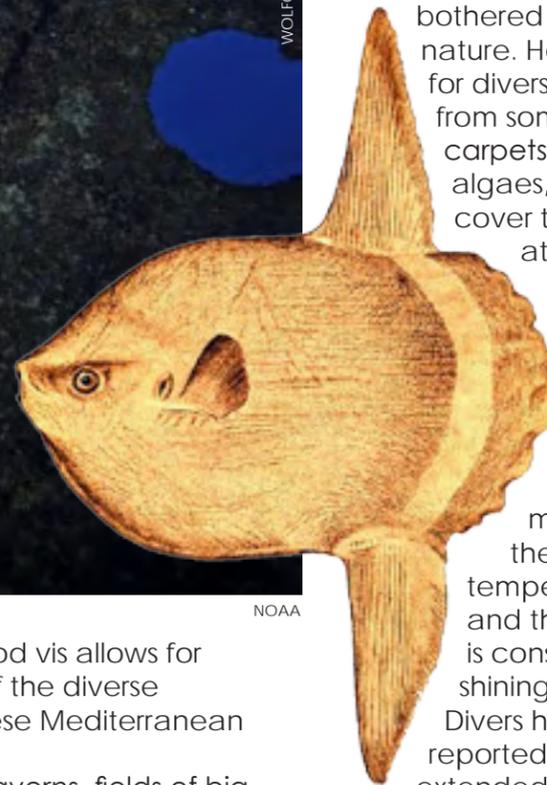


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swimmers at the southeastern part of the island. But neoprene-coated divers aren't bothered by this curiosity of nature. However, irritation for divers does come from some really huge carpets of filamentous algae, which completely cover the sea bottom at some of the dive sites during the summer.

There is another phenomenon which happens during summer months when the surface water temperature is warm and the sun is constantly shining.

Divers have reported extended encounters with sunfishes, which seem to enjoy the escort of the divers. Sometimes they have even been found sleeping on the surface. But if you get too close to them, their instincts kick in and their alarm-clock goes off. Within



NOAA

Elba

a few seconds, these huge, lazy and dull looking animals take up an unbelievable speed and disappear into the deep blue.

There is just one thing that is missing around Porto Azzurro to make it a perfect

dive destination—a wreck. Around Elba, there are quite a lot of wrecks to be found but in depths that are out of range for recreational divers.

However, to make everybody happy, there is a really nice wreck on Elba accessible even for sport divers. Unfortunately, you'll have to exchange the comfortable boat ride on the *Matteo Sandro* for a 40-minute car-ride to the other side of the island. My advice, make that trip. Take your dive equipment and go to the southwestern coast of Elba. There, you will find a small village called Pomonte.

Thirty-five years ago, the cargo ship



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Elviscott crashed on the small rocks located 200 metres away from Pomonte beach. It sustained machine damage and sunk directly at the rock. Now, it is one of Pomonte's attractions. Even while snorkelling, you can have your wreck experience there, and scuba divers can explore this wreck nearly completely, at a maximum



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depth of only 14 metres, during an extended one-tank-dive. It's just a 200-metre snorkel trip from the beach to the left side of the island rocks. You will not be able to fail this wreck.

If you are on the car once again on your 30-kilometre trip back to Porto Azzurro, you should use the chance to add some more kilometres to your trip and discover the other, northern side of Elba. Narrow and winding roads lead you around Monte Capanne, which is 1019 metres tall and the highest hill of the island. Fantastic views are offered at several sightseeing points. And if you would like to walk in Napoleon's footprints, you could see his former villa and his museum. Or you can just take a walk and try to find Napoleon's life-sized stone statue on a wall in the small mountain village of Marciana north of the Monte Capanne.

The versatile three-wheel *Ape's are now seeing a renaissance all over Italy



Matteo Sandro, owner of Omnisub Elba gives a dive briefing

If you are looking for more adventure, you can enter Monte Capanne by foot. It's a nice but not so easy trek of about four hours. But at the station on the top of the hill you, will be rewarded with an awesome view overlooking the island. And in good weather conditions with good visibility, you will see the other islands of the Tuscan archipelago and sometimes even Corse. Bring good shoes to take this route. If you want to tour the hill in flip-flops, you better take the cable-lift. It is really spectacular and takes you up and down the slope in small metal-cages. With luck, two people



Elba

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The dive center Omnisub Elba has a private pier for its dive vessels Sisto on the left and Matteo Sandro on the right.



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A day of diving at the *Pomonte* wreck and a long exploratory tour of the island of Elba can only be finished with a good Tuscan red wine and an Italian pizza. I know that many of our readers believe they know what it means to have a real Italian pizza with a great glass of red wine. But let me elaborate... I am talking about sitting together with friends on a warm summer night, outside, with a great pizza on the table, smelling the Mediterranean Sea, seeing the stars above, and drinking good red wine until you are tired enough to fall sleep and enjoy a night of wonderful dreams. Good night, Elba. I'll be back again next year! ■

can stand in one of these cages without panicking. (Every ski-lift I've ever seen have been more comfortable and intelligent in construction than these cages. Maybe they were used in a "former life" as a white knuckle ride in a "tunnel of horror"?)

fact file



Elba, Italy



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Further reading about Elba

History The oldest known group of humans living on Elba were the Ilvates who had roots in Liguria. Later on, from about 750 BC, the Etruscan were located on Elba. They were the first to use iron ore on the island. Much later, around 500 BC, Greeks occupied the island and called it Aithalia, which means *fuming*, due to the endless fires of ferrum production and the carbon black in the air. It was 246 BC when the Romans conquered the island. Elba was under Roman influence for more than 800 years.

In the sixth century AD, the Langobards integrated the island into their empire. In 787 AD, Elba was given as a gift to the pontifex in Rome. But the Roman Church never influenced Elba's development and finally gave the island as a gift to the important naval force of Pisa. Pisa had supported Rome for a long time in the continuous fight against the Saracen, an Arabic Muslim people who had attacked Italian seaports for a long period of time.

Under the control of Pisa, a lot of monumental buildings were constructed on Elba. In the 13th century, Elba was attacked several times by forces from Genova, the major rival power during this time. In the

following years, Elba's sovereigns changed quite often. Eventually, the island was split. Finally, even Porto Longone, today's Porto Azzuro, was captured in 1596 by Philipp III of Spain.

During the revolutionary wars, the island was occupied by England, and later on, after the peace conference of Amiens, Elba was given to France. After the short era under Napoleon, Elba was given to the dukedom of Tuscany, and later on, joined the united kingdom of Italy.

Geography Elba is Italy's third largest island located about ten kilometres off the Ligurian coastline. It is around 225 square kilometres in size and the largest island of the Tuscan archipelago with a coastline of about 150 kilometres. The island is divided into eight districts: Portoferraio (the capital of Elba), Campo nell'Elba, Capoliveri, Marciana, Marciana Marina, Porto Azzurro, Rio Marina and Rio nell'Elba. Elba's highest mountain is Monte Capanne with a elevation of 1019 metres. Porto Azzurro is a small seaport on the southeastern side of the island. In the winter during the off season, there are around 3000 inhabitants living in Porto Azzurro.

Climate Mediterranean climate with mild winters and long warm summers. Average yearly temperatures are around 17°C. Spring is warm and mild with many hours of sunlight and infrequent rains. Summertime from June to mid-September rarely gets very hot, in the range of 35 to 37°C. Late summer and autumn occur from mid-September up to end of the diving season at beginning of November when water temperatures are still very comfortable. Water temperatures normally do not become less than 10°C. In summertime, it climbs up to about 24°C (surface temperature). For divers in the winter and springtime, a semi-dry suit is quite comfortable, a drysuit is perfect. In summertime, 5-7 mm wetsuits are perfect.

Currency Euro. Exchange rates: 1 EUR = 1.48 USD, .74 GBP, 158.13 JPY, 1.47 CAD, 1.66 AUD, 2.09 SGD

Language Italian. Most people, especially those working in tourism speak English and perhaps some Spanish, French or German.

Visas & Permits All members of Schengen countries of the European community need only a valid identity

card. Visitors from all other countries need a passport and a classic visa.

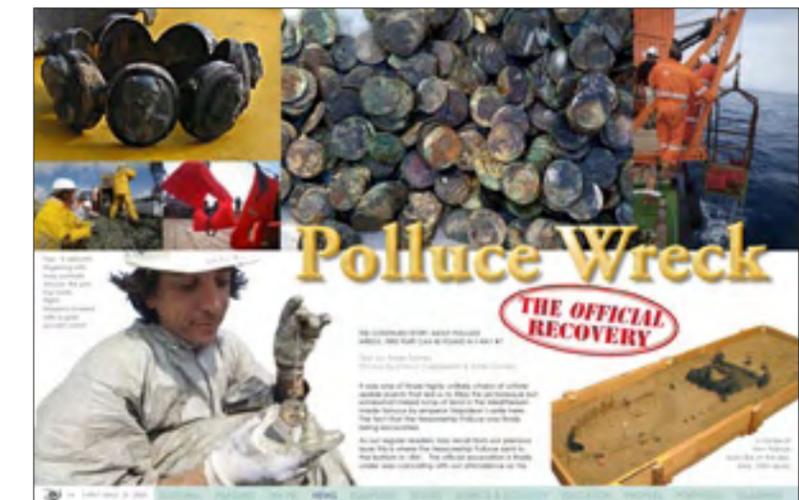
Travel info Airport at Elba: "La Pila", Elba International Airport Tel: +39.0565.976011 www.elbaisland-airport.it Located two kilometres from Marina di Campo. The next largest international airport is located at Pisa. There is a train connection from here to Piombino marittimo (Ferry Harbour). Ferries depart around every 30 minutes during the high season from Piombino to Portoferraio at Elba. Direct connections from Piombino to Porto Azzurro are also available, but only during the high season and just few rides per day. Car transfers to the island during the high season should be booked ahead of time. Two ferry lines serve this route. The price during the high season for transportation of one person and one car is about 43 Euro (round trip). For more information, timetables and prices, see www.torremar.it or www.mobbylines.it

Information Info-portal about the island of Elba is at www.elbalink.it Available in Italian, German and English.

[Link to Google map of Elba >>>](#)



Just off the coast of Elba a treasure wreck - the Polluce was excavated in 2005 under heavy surveillance by the Carabinieri. Right-click on the cover to download or go to this link: www.x-ray-mag.com/pdfs/articles/Feature_PolluceWreck_07.pdf



Part 2 - the excavation. Right-click on the cover to download or go to this link: www.x-ray-mag.com/pdfs/articles/Feature_PolluceWreck_TheRecovery_08.pdf

