

Undercurrent®

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Guanaja, Bay Islands, Honduras

—three choices, if you choose at all

Dear Reader,

Honduras' Caribbean Bay Islands - Guanaja, Roatan, Utila. Man, they sound good on paper. We've written about them before, but I, the editor of this little missive, had never been. It was about time.

I decided to visit three diving resorts on Guanaja, which I selected to get a little adventure other than diving, eating, socializing and sleeping. Specifically, I was enticed by the possibility of hiking through forests laden with parrots and tropical flora and fauna, which ads for Guanaja are quick to tout. And that Guanaja is roadless, with all transportation between villages and hotels either by boat or shanks mare, added to my romantic image.

One gets to Guanaja on Islena Airlines from several Honduran cities- La Ceiba, Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula. My 18 seat flight was packed and steamy, cooled only by a small electric fan that didn't work anyhow. To ease my suffering, I read the March issue of Condé Nast Traveler, in which I stumbled across an article about Bayman Bay Club. The nondiving author wrote:

"Our fellow divers were zealots - two dives a day, sometimes a third at night - while we spent our afternoons lolling on the lovely beach. Yet we couldn't help but notice that as a group they seemed rather unathletic. How to put it delicately? Fat. (They loved the food.) This might not be coincidence - scuba diving being one of those nonsport sports that lets nonsports feel like jocks, requiring more effort than breathing and flipper flapping. And what greater relief than weightlessness for the weighty? Certainly our lodge mates looked more graceful down there than above the surface and, of course, when they were diving, they couldn't talk about diving. Because as exciting as diving is to do, it's that unexciting to discuss."

Well, that would set them buzzing at Bayman Bay. After a harrowing landing through updrafts and downdrafts, we were picked up in an open boat and motored

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for 20 minutes to the lovely Bayman Bay Club, where a welcome drink and an introduction to the hotel awaited us. Nestled in the tropical forest, up a couple of flights of stairs from the dock and a lovely white beach, is the centerpiece of Bayman Bay, a four story, open-air tree house of sorts, fashioned from tropical woods. On the second floor is a centrally located bar (usually attended), long tables for communal dining, a gift shop with good T's, and an open deck well-populated at cocktail hour. One story up is a real surprise - a large, wonderful room divided into a well-organized library of books left behind and a video player, and other areas with several hand-made game tables (backgammon, a poker table with chips), a pool table (the cushions are ready for the crematorium), and comfortable couches for lounging. Up top, sits the crow's nest for even a greater view. Great building, good design, well decorated - hell, if given half a chance, I'd make it my private home.

Frankly, I'm not sure why the divers loved Bayman's food, but there were plenty of folks fitting Traveler's snooty description. Then again, diving does whip up an appetite - while burning few calories, maybe a hundred more than sitting on a bar stool, unless the water is cold. For the most part, the food was unremarkable. Served buffet style, it lacked vegetables or imagination. One night, ground beef tacos, deep-fried burritos and beans (actually my kind of meal, with a couple of cold beers). Another night, dull finger-sized lobster tails, pasta with a tomato sauce, coleslaw, and an odd cake dessert. Or pork with a brown sauce, deep fried breadfruit (a hit) and a tasty banana/coconut pudding with whipped cream. Lunch might be spaghetti with ground hamburger meat sauce, salad with iceberg lettuce and tomatoes, a couple of pieces of good bread, fruit cups, or make your own tacos, with first-rate flour tortillas. Breakfast was generally scrambled eggs, juice, several fruits, pancakes or french toast, and never any meat, causing a few guests to grouse.

By today's standards, Bayman is modestly priced (\$700-750/person/week, double occupancy, all food, 2 boat dives/day and unlimited shore diving). What you get is what you pay for (like popcorn is the only cocktail hour snack) - and a little bit more (they'll pop more if you ask). Nestled in the hills on the island's leeward side, the 14 rustic cottages have expansive water views and decks on which to sit and sip and see the sun sizzle into the sea's surface. Ssssst. The cabins are basic, with firm beds, screened and louvered windows, an overhead fan for cooling, and showers with wooden floors through which the runoff drips. Plenty of chirping birds announce the breaking of dawn and, throughout the day, three-foot iguanas bask in the branches of trees below.

I had the distinct impression that the Bayman Bay Club is frozen in time, a late seventies state-of-the-art tropical dive hangout, the kind of spot I've come to prefer over the slick and sanitized Divi-type operations. The owner Tom Foukes, who lives mainly in Florida or on mainland Honduras, was present during my entire stay, staying behind the scenes, yet amiable and helpful whenever asked. Its pleasant and friendly staff were always responsive to my requests.

The dive operation has a loose '70's style as well, but, in this case, I'm not being complimentary. My partner, inexperienced that she is in the ways of

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the underwater world, was concerned that our welcome included no briefing about the dive operation and no introduction to the divemaster. (A chalk board sits near the bar, advertising the next day's dives, but it was always blank). I surmised that it would be offered the next morning - which it wasn't.

The boats moor on the single dock, where sits a shack for storing gear and a fresh water rinse. We arrived 20 minutes ahead of the scheduled 9am dive. Youthful Hondurans loaded tanks on the boat, and we figured out the modus operandi was "get your own gear, tote it 50 feet to the boat, and hook it up to an aluminum 80." Near departure time, we were asked for dive cards by Clay, a young Honduran, who got us weights. Again, my inexperienced partner felt concerned. She'd never had one of these "just get on the boat and go experiences."

On the way to the reef, an L.A. sort-of-guy with a housed Nikon F3 exclaimed, "Man, this diving really sucks." Next to him sat a New Yorker with a Nikonos. "Yeah," he added, "We haven't had a good dive in three days." I got up and ambled to the front of the roomy 35 foot craft. There stood a chubby couple, he finishing a cigarette, she chewing gum deliriously. "So how's the diving been?" I asked. In perfect harmony they chirped, "beautiful, just beautiful."

At Black Rock, about a 25 minute motor at 6-7 knots, young Clay briefed us with a memorized spiel, giving a profile of 60 feet for 40 minutes, and said he would lead the way. It was an unusual dive, like soaring through a flooded miniature Canyonlands National Park, with pillar and walls of rock stretching from the sand bottom to the surface. We cruised through the passages, a couple of times entering shallow caves where we did 180 degree loops. No coral of any significance here. No fish either. Visibility approaching 100 feet. This was a dive for geologists, unique by Caribbean standards.

But the guys with cameras were not here for topography. "I came to shoot fish," the LA guy said, "and there are none. This place is overbilled."

The next dive changed his tune. After motoring back to the dive dock, the crew unhooked our gear, exchanged tanks, and draped our BC's and regulators on new tanks. We were back in the water at Fantasy Reef, out front of Bayman Bay, after a surface time of 85 minutes, with instructions that the dive would be 40 minutes at 50 feet (the bottom was no deeper anyhow.) Indeed, conservative limits, they were nearly always exceeded by Clay himself. If I rode out my computer for another 15 minutes or dropped deeper, nothing was said (once three of us extended a ridiculous 40 minute limit to 65 minutes; they banged on the bottom of the boat to get our attention.)

Fantasy Reef was a decent dive (visibility 70-75 feet, water temperature 79-80 degrees, making rubber helpful) with lovely hard corals, pillar corals, soft corals, and, in little cuts, striking gorgonia in several hues: white and red and black. I came across a couple of grouper about 10 pounds, a pair of queen angels, a pair of butterfly fish. Upon entry, a school of blue chromis flowed with a score of Bermuda chubs. Nothing spectacular, but satisfying in a meditative sort of way. "The first good dive we've had," said the LA guy.

All dives (they're all marked by buoys) were similar - either pretty coral, a range of tropicals and nothing big or 60 foot canyons, little coral, few fish. The best dives for fish freaks is an hour away by slow boat, through the channel that bisects the island, past the grass strip airport. There, near Southwest Caye, are Guanaja's two Seaworld dives - the Jado Trader and Jim's Silverlode - where the fish are regularly fed. Groupers as long as your arm greet you when you hit the water, green morays as long as your partner swirl about, and a panoply of other fish gather to take the bait. Everybody dives them once, maybe twice a week, and the Bay Islands Aggressor ties up weekly.

The Jado Trader, 200 plus feet long, has a deck at 80 feet, the bottom is 100-110 feet. Little growth has encrusted the craft, but there are bait fish in the hull, big grouper, at least one giant eel, yellow tails and others, and in the hundred plus visibility, good opportunities for cruising in and out of the open wreck. It's a super fish dive. After a few minutes, my buddy and I moved to a nearby pinnacle to let off a little nitrogen. Of the 14 divers on the boat, two didn't make the wreck, having trouble with the blue water aspect of it. The crew did little to cater to the inexperienced, above or below water. Clay's likeable older brother Bo, is in charge of the dive operation. Though he was around several days, he didn't dive with us and did nothing to enhance diving organization other than to lend it his cheerful personality.

Cayman Environmental Crises

The marine environment of Grand Cayman is under siege. Three serious incidents have occurred in less than a month.

In the latest event, Cayman Islands environmental authorities issued an advisory against eating fish caught in or around George Town Harbor after several ocean triggers were discovered either dead or in a stressed condition.

According to David Vousden, Director of Natural Resources, "we don't know what was wrong so as a precaution we issued the advisory for 48 hours. We have collected fish and they are being hand carried to Nainaimo, BC to be studied. It will be several weeks before we hear anything. Right now, we don't have any idea of what happened."

In early March, the cruise ship *Seaward*, of the Norwegian Cruise line, was charged with dumping inadequately treated sewage into the harbor. This case is in court.

Two weeks ago, a portion of the coastline was closed due to an oil slick washing ashore. Vousden told us that "we get a lot of tanker traffic around these islands and some vessels are not as careful as they should be. We do not know who is responsible for the illegal dumping but we are trying to find out and if we do they will be prosecuted."

of water, and flamingo tongues on several sea fans. And the LA guy parked himself on the dock ladder at night, snorkel only, and shot wave-after-wave of eagle rays that cruise in nightly to feed on plankton drawn to the lights. But I never saw these critters during the day, nor did I see sharks (save for one small nurse) or any other pelagics.

So, that's why experienced divers were disappointed and why the tyros were delighted. And, unlike our Traveler buddy, I found that as the week passed, people grew tired talking of the diving. That doesn't happen where the diving is exciting.

The Nautilus Dive Club is roughly four miles from Bayman Bay and two from the airport. Opened last summer by two German engineers, it sits 100 yards down a verdant path from the beach; behind the house, hiking trails go straight up.

After lunch (potato salad, fried chicken, watermelon, soda or beer) on Southeast Caye, a little snorkeling on a nice shallow reef, followed by a great fish dive at Jim's Silverload (that I'll describe later), then home by 3:45. So as not to become a subject for a future Traveler article, my buddy and I took a hike when the temperature dropped into the low 80's and the winds picked up. The Club's friendly mutts joined us, leading for nearly two hours at a sturdy clip, up and down hills, along two beaches. Interestingly, after one climbs nearly straight up for a few hundred feet to the breathtaking views, the jungle turns to pine trees, the path strewn with needles and cones, the landscape dotted with boulders. Occasionally, we would spot iguanas, see hawks soaring above, or a wild parrot from a distance.

The dives at Black Rock and Fantasy Reef are similar to every dive we took, save for the fish feeds. You will do well with a tank off the beach at night (several octopus in the rocks, maybe cuttlefish nearby, fish-eating hydroids, decent shallow reefs) or snorkeling in the day - I found a three foot hawksbill turtle under a coral head in four feet

Reminiscent of a bed and breakfast inn (but with three square "home-cooked" meals a day), it consists of four bedrooms in a modern home (and two bedrooms in an adjacent building). Pleasant, air-conditioned bedrooms have private baths (there was no hot water during my stay, as the owner waited patiently for a new water heater to arrive). On the second level is an open dining area, home style kitchen, and a small sitting area with a VCR. Sliding glass doors open to a long narrow deck, where my buddy and I sat at night in the hammock, watching the fire flies flicker in the trees, sipping rums from the honor bar. Proprietor Gerd Ottehenning welcomed us cheerfully and the communal dining made us feel as if we were visiting the home of friends. (Four Texans and two German fellows, staying for five weeks, were the other guests; one night, four American expat couples who came to Guanaja to live in isolation and luxury joined us for cocktails and dinner.)

The jolly cook, local resident Oosta, speaks only Spanish and delights in communicating with anyone who will even try to say "Una cerveza, por favor." Her basic "home cooking," some combination of German, Honduran, and universal, were superior to those served at Bayman and Posada. The lobster tails, served in unlimited quantities, were far tastier than Bayman's; they were accompanied with potatoes and vegetables. Another night, fresh king fish, salad and vegetables, with a fresh cake for dessert brought to us as we swung in the hammock. One lunch was a fresh salad with ham in it, macaroni and cheese, and zucchini as a side dish. Fresh pineapple, papaya and juice (once fresh cantaloupe juice) proceeded breakfasts of eggs, bacon or ham, and either pancakes or french toast. The only letdown was lunch prepared for the dive boat.

The simplicity here is reminiscent of dive operations in the '60's, the beginning of diving time, at '60's prices (\$560/person/day, three meals, two boat dives; there is no shore diving or snorkeling). Seaside is a small building near the water, with a small room for hanging gear, the compressor, a fresh water tank and a new dock. But no dive boat. Gerd is an instructor and joins inexperienced divers, but most diving is contracted out to a local fisherman/diver. Therein lies its own tale.

As I climbed aboard his aging cabin cruiser and shook hands with slightly paunchy, 39 year old Gilbert Wood, I learned I was the only diver. "Where do you

Coralita Explodes

The *Coralita*, that well-traveled Aussie dive boat from which many have visited the far reaches of the Coral Sea, is no more.

On the evening of March 10, while tied up at an inlet in Cairns harbor, an explosion in the engine room destroyed the *Coralita*.

According to owner and captain Alby Ziebell, the *Coralita* was being refitted and had just that day undergone a Commonwealth marine survey in preparation for departing for Papua New Guinea. "Fortunately no one was hurt. The last of the crew had left the boat just about 20 minutes before she blew up."

Ziebell is not sure what happened, but he thinks that during the survey the vents in the engine room were closed, to make sure they worked, and the engine room door was shut. These are normal steps taken to contain any possible fire that might occur in the engine room. Ziebell says that apparently "no one thought to open the vents or the door again because the boat was not being moved. The battery gave off hydrogen which collected in the engine room, then the bilge pumps came on automatically and a spark touched the hydrogen off."

"A lot of history went up with that spark," Ziebell says.

But history gives way to progress and the next boat will be bigger, better and more suited to today's diver. Under construction is a 96 foot craft (26 feet wide) for 16 passengers in twin share cabins with en-suite. Although *Coralita* staff member Don Roulston says they hope to have it ready for the next Coral Sea season, they will charter a vessel of "suitable standard" to be crewed by *Coralita* staff.

Roulston says that they have found a vessel to complete this season in Papua New Guinea. Divers with deposits who can't fit into the rescheduled calendar will have their money refunded.

want to go?" he asked, pointing at a chart with some 60 marked sites. "Wherever the best diving is." We headed past Southwest Key to a new spot; Blacktip Slumberland.

Damn, it's a slow boat. "Barely three knots", Gilbert said. "But we'll get there." He sat at the wheel, one hand filled with chipped ice that he rubbed on his scalp. He shook his head. "Drank too much beer yesterday. I hardly ever drink. I go three, maybe four months without drinking." When we reached the site, he turned the fresh water hose over his head. "Well, let's go diving," he said. "I'll feel better down there."

I dived with Gilbert on three days and regardless of his initial hang-over, he was just fine the other days. He's my kind of guide: a colorful local character, an excellent diver, self trained, who knows every nook and cranny of the reefs. I asked him if he quit fishing because the reefs are barren? "No, no," he said, "you've gotta fish deep today. A thousand feet for snappers. There are plenty there. But, I'd rather do this."...."What about lobster? I've see only one or two a dive. Are they gone?" I asked. "No, they're like Chinamen," he said, conjuring up a belief from the days when the West feared an attack by Communist China. "The more you take, the more there are." Well, that's true neither for Chinese nor lobsters, but why argue?

"Ever get bent diving?," I asked. "Never, but one of my divers shot to the surface, then got crazy. He started swimming in circles, talking crazy things. I got him on board and he said nothing was wrong, but he began to itch and his skin got red. The next day he was hurting, so I took him down to 120 feet-- 20 feet deeper than where he got bent. Took him there for 10 minutes, then to 110 feet for a minute, and all the way up minute by minute to ten feet. I kept him there for 3-1/2 hours and all the symptoms went away. He was cured."

Blacktip Slumberland (one of those cute names probably selected just to advertise in magazines) turned out to be my best dive around Guanaja, though the blacktips are probably long gone, if they ever were there. Three times, flowing schools of a thousand flashing bogia darted by. All common reef fish were present, including a couple of juvenile spotted drums and a few large snapper and grouper. Most impressive were the lovely corals and hanging rope and tube sponges. Black and white crynoids clung to some, fully open to a barely noticeable current. Visibility was probably 60 feet maximum, yet a lovely dive. Most of the dive was 60-90 feet; we stayed 'till I ran out of air, about an hour.

For the second dive, we motored to Afternoon Delight, a pleasant reef no

Guanaja

Diving for Experienced ★ ★ (★ ★)

Diving for Beginners ★ ★ ★ (★)

Diving for Photographers ★ ★ (★)

Dive Operation

Bayman ★ ★ ★
Nautilus ★ ★ ★
Posada ★ ★ (★ ★)

Accommodation

Bayman ★ ★ ★ ★
Nautilus ★ ★ ★
Posada ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Food

Bayman ★ ★ ★ 1/2
Nautilus ★ ★ ★
Posada ★ ★

Ambience

Bayman ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Nautilus ★ ★ ★ ★
Posada ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Moneysworth

Bayman ★ ★ ★ ★
Nautilus ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Posada ★ ★ ★ ★

★ poor, ★★ fair, ★★★ average, ★★★★ good, ★★★★★ excellent

deeper than 60 feet, with plenty of soft corals, some algae, large snappers and a sizeable midnight parrot fish swimming so close I could have picked its teeth with my knife. Another day, we dived leeward of Southeast Caye, where a little wall dropped to 75 feet. I encountered a couple of tire-sized southern sting rays. One remained calm as I stroked its wing, but when I reached to scratch it between the eyes, it scooted off. Along the way there were queen angels and grey angels, a beautiful helmet conch, and garden eels swaying to the music of the ocean. Purple tunicates formed flower-like clusters as they extended from soft corals, and tube sponges and small yellow finger-sized sponges dotted the reef.

Gilbert dons his tank in the water, slowly sinking while he wrestles with it. He doesn't wear a BC. He wears two wet suits. He never gave a dive plan, unless asked. During the course of two dives, he disappeared for several minutes, conducting his own private searches. Once he showed me a little coral patch 75 yards from the main reef, with half a dozen big lobster at 90 feet. "You still take lobster, Gilbert?" I asked after the dive. "Not from the dive sites," he says. "No one does. If we see people fishing around the moorings, we get them."...."But those lobster? Well, someday. Nobody else knows they're there. Otherwise they wouldn't be there." Gilbert's a throwback in time, damn enjoyable for those of us who like to do our own thing. He took me wherever I wanted, let me do whatever I wanted. But damn, that's a slow boat. Nonetheless, he'll get you to most of the best spots, as often as you want.

After three days, we were then picked up at Nautilus for the 10 minute boat ride to Posada del Sol by Michael Cundliff, the owner's son. He grouched to Gerd about having to pick us up, made only a gratuitous offer to carry our bags down the long path to the boat, complained how he was overworked, then wondered aloud what Posada would do next week since they had seriously overbooked (apparently they do this occasionally, moving staff out of their quarters and even farming people out to Nautilus).

But the personable managers, Chuck and Jane, gave us a warm greeting and a nice chat about the operation. She told us to leave our dive gear on the front porch and the staff would take it to the dive boats (they load about 150 yards from the hotel entrance under a covered dock). There would be an all day dive trip on Tuesday to Barbaretta, a small island off the tip of Roatan, and another full day excursion to Michael's Rock, with a picnic and a short hike to a waterfall. Since I told her I had dived Michael's Rock earlier and was unimpressed, she assured me that boats go out for two tanks in the AM, return for lunch, then go again in the afternoon and that other dives would be available.

NOT. My buddy and I arrived the first morning for the three tank dive to Barbaretta with our releases and c-cards in hand. What seemed like a score of people were shuffling tanks from one boat to another, but no one paid a whit of attention to us. At last, someone asked how much weight we needed and sent someone to pick up my dive bag when I explained it hadn't been dropped off. The releases and c-cards were ignored. The seas looked awfully choppy, so when my partner queried two people about the nature of the ride, she was informed, quite correctly, that it would be a tough ride. She decided to opt out and would take one of the other dives listed on the big board. But, that was old information. People had left a little early and gone off the dock and no alternative was offered in the afternoon. She stayed dry.

That night, we checked the board to see what tomorrow had in store; sites for a second boat were listed in lieu of Michael's Rock. Wednesday AM, we arrived for the alternate. Trouble is, there was none. The second boat was being repaired. Another dry day. Two days later, my buddy would have liked a single tank in the morning, but didn't care to sit on the boat while others pursued the second dive. She passed time with a woman who had come to snorkel,

I lost 3000 psi in a few seconds!

Dear Undercurrent:

"I bought a TUSA TR 200 in 1987 and had about 100 dives on it. Not long ago, I mounted my recently serviced regulator on the tank and turned on the air. I took a couple of breaths to make sure it was working and then dropped over the side. Immediately, something gave way and air rushed through the second stage mouthpiece, emptying my tank. I aborted the dive.

Back on board, I heard something rattle around in it. I turned it upside down and some parts fell out of the mouthpiece. I took it back to the shop where it was repaired and they said 'that should not have happened.'" Is this a regulator problem? Or a repair problem?

Dr. Cole Adams, Yazoo City, MS

Dear Dr. Adams,

That regulator has a reputation as a real work horse, so we called Roddy Rinton, Technical Representative for Tabata USA. He told us:

"Nothing can come loose inside a regulator if the self-sealing lug is tightened down properly — and if

the proper lug is used. Some repair people will use parts from different companies, especially if they are out of stock on a particular piece.

"But not all parts are interchangeable. Some lugs look the same but may have slightly smaller threads or slightly larger internal diameters. In those cases, the lug will not tighten down. The internal parts may be loose and when water suddenly hits the internal mechanism, such as might happen with a boat entry, the force of the water will further loosen the lug. Once the lug has come off, the regulator will freeflow such as your reader experienced. All down-stream regulators are designed to give air if they malfunction. It shouldn't shut off."

On another note, I remember years ago when my instructor told me never to put a regulator into my mouth and inhale without purging it once or twice before. He explained that a friend had his regulator overhauled and, trusting it would work, put it in his mouth for the first inhale. A carpet tack, which apparently had fallen into the mouthpiece at the dive store, flew out and lodged in the back of his throat.

Ben Davison

but found there was nothing off the beach (this is the windward side and the water is murky). Both were unhappy campers when they learned that after the first dive, the boat had dropped off a couple of snorkelers on Southwest Caye — and a couple of divers who wanted a single tank. All without telling anyone else.

Four dive days, three days of lousy communication, several missed dives. A bulletin board to announce the days dives sits near the dining area. It was always blank. Once, Chuck made a verbal announcement about snorkeling at the end of breakfast, but people who had eaten earlier missed it. Such a simple problem to rectify!

Once on board, I found solid organization, with a helpful staff that hooks up the gear, handles cameras, gives good briefings, and directs dives well. Profiles are conservative. On our trip to Barbaretta, the first dive was announced to 80 feet for 30 minutes (though we stayed for 40 minutes and there really was no control over depth); the second dive (after a 35 minute surface interval) was 50 feet for 30 minutes (we stayed for 35); then 105 minute surface time (lunch on board--it was better taken at the hotel-- fried chicken, coleslaw in a light dressing, tomatoes, cucumbers, and cookies and banana bread — and we had a chance to explore a beautiful beach and look for fragments of jade); and a third dive to 50 feet for 40 minutes. Since we had taken the slowest of their boats, the trip lasted from 8:30 to 6 pm (bring a book), across seas with 5-6 foot waves, apparently normal for the journey. It was not a ride for weak stomachs, as one retching guest demonstrated.

Yet, these were two of the more beautiful coral and sponge dives (though the visibility ran 50-80 feet) in my 13 days on Guanaja — again with common reef fish in modest numbers and no pelagics. I found a beautiful brown ball-shaped sponge that turned white upon touch. A couple of barrel sponges had tooth-like corals growing in the center, and hundreds of juveniles hovered in the crevices of a

large barrel sponge, reminiscent of South Pacific coral heads. During the second dive, I came across two patches of abundant coral, with plenty of yellow tail snappers, silver and red snappers, gray and French angels, ocean triggers, even a trunk fish. The third dive, to 50 feet, was more like Guanaja. Though I enjoyed the diving, it's not a "gotta do." Since they need 10 people at \$40 extra (does it really cost them \$400 more to make this journey, compared to three dives back home?), you might not make it anyhow.

Much of the diving offered is around Southwest Key, but the boat does go to the Bayman side as well; in fact, all operations dive the same sites, including Jim's Silverlode. We dropped down a beautiful wall (a black and white spotted drum, trumpet fish, small groupers) to a more shallow feeding station, where big tiger groupers and a giant green moray pose. It was 80 feet for 30 minutes, but everyone stayed longer to get pictures of themselves holding the eel - whose head was about as big as the divers. (Because of the proclivity of this behemoth to swim between people's legs, an iron jock might be an accessory worth considering. On this dive, they dropped a decompression bar over the side (and, right on board in plain sight sits an oxygen tank and a compressed air tank with a regulator on a 10-foot hose).

One second dive should have been scrubbed. At Half Moon Cay Channel, visibility ran 15 to 25 feet. The divemaster sent us out with the current; some divers, including people finishing certification were diving with buddies but no divemaster. (Hector, the dive instructor, claims to get serious sinus headaches and is often not in the water.) With no instruction about when to turn around in a current, they ended up struggling back on the surface. No one was in danger, but it was a pain in the ass and a lousy dive with few fish. My guess is that it got us a surface interval while we were motoring back.

On another dive, a teenager sped along, far ahead of her buddy, in 40 feet of water. Her fin strap broke. She picked up the fin, looked at it, then streaked for the surface. Her buddy grabbed her leg, but she kicked free and continued to the surface. Luckily, nothing happened, but she needed days to get over the fear she felt when she realized what she had nearly done to herself.

Enough about diving. Let's talk hotel. The lovely, hacienda-style Posada surely appears more upscale than its competitors, though it too is reasonably priced (\$800-900/person/week, three meals, three boat dives; there is limited shore diving but the bottom is frequently stirred up, a divemaster told us). Eight nicely decorated cottages sit in a peaceful, tropical hillside setting. Most of the action happens on the second level, which features a large wooden deck with a clean fresh water pool (into which two very tacky people jumped with all their urine-soaked dive gear to wash it off for the trip home.) Along one side are chairs facing the treetops and ocean. On one end is the bar (always attended by a bartender) and the outside dining area.

Nine pleasant poolside rooms sit on the other side. For my money, the best is #12, with a separate screened sitting area, nicely decorated with hardwood furniture and a comfortable couch, far enough from the pool and bar for peaceful sleeping; if it's not available, request a cottage, rather than the several darker rooms, "called oceanfront" built ground level below the pool. Surrounding all of this are picturesque seaside grounds with a little man-made beach, coconut palms, lawns and cement walkways, and even maintained tennis courts, where one can shoot a few hoops, as well. For an aerobic workout, we took hikes up the trail in back, and also hitched a ride on the staff boat to the village of Savannah Bight and hiked across the island to another village, Mangrove Bight. Phillip, Posada's gardener, volunteered to go with us to show us the way, but there's no getting lost and people along the way were pleasant, though taciturn.

Now with such a lovely place, one would expect cuisine up to its standards; unfortunately, it's what you might get at political banquets for third party candidates in Sioux City. Soup was usually served at both lunch and dinner; several bowls were barely palatable. A chowder had old, dry fish in it; another soup had a piece of boiled chicken in it, its white goose-bumpy skin entirely unappetizing. Shrimp in a sauteed shrimp dinner tasted of freezer burn, though fresh green beans and small potatoes were tasty. A lunch of chicken with carrots and peppers was well presented, yet proved bland and uninteresting. The only fresh fish served in five days appeared as deep-fried fish sticks, accompanied by sliced tomato and cucumber, with mashed potatoes; frankly, it seemed suited for a high school lunch room. I had a bottle of Italian white wine that was passable at \$10, but paid \$30.

But, we learned some tricks. Pick off what you want then ask for another plate; there was no shortage of food. Better yet, ask what's for dinner and order only what you want. Although they present no alternatives and just start bringing food, make a request. I followed the lead of one lady who had been ordering turkey sandwiches for lunch; I ordered one and even though a ham-and-cheese arrived with no explanation, my lunch companions were envious. Regardless of the error, the service was actually excellent; friendly, pleasant and fast. Meals were served outside (there is a dining room for stormy days) at tables seating six. People ate alone only if they preferred. After dinner, we might sit and chat with the attorney from Sacramento coming for his first diving, the traveling couple from England, who have been just about everywhere, or Honduran businessmen from the mainland, here for a couple of days of diving. And, don't forget the Texans, only a three hour hop from Honduras. Then, maybe a move to the bar to chat with Chuck, the manager, a friendly, interesting fellow with long experience in the hotel industry.

Now how does Guanaja rate? With the exception of the feeding stations, diving for photographers is poor unless you want to shoot models with wide angle along lovely coral. Even macro was limited. Two stars. (Go with Gilbert to maximize bottom time). For beginning divers, three, maybe four stars; the better dive operation is Posada if you can figure out what's happening; it could rate four stars (my experience was a two star special), Bayman three. Gilbert's in a class of his own. Accommodations? They all get 4-5 stars for carrying off what they are supposed to be at a price that's right. You get your moneysworth. Food? Nautilus four, Bayman three, Posada two. Overall? Damn, I wish they had Bonaire's or Belize's fish; or even Cayman's. But because Guanaja provides that experience of weightlessness described by our fellow Traveler writer, for some folks that might be just enough. And, the price is right.

C.C., travel editor

Diver's Compass: Posada is best for photographers; they have a photo shop, with cameras and camcorders to rent, film to sell, and overnight E-6 developing and some repair capacity; at Bayman, electrical surges blew out two strobes being charged by the LA guy . . . Honduras is served by Continental, American and other airlines through Houston, New Orleans and Miami; the fare to Guanaja runs about \$500. . . No-see-ums are vicious throughout the island; the most deadly time was at 6:30 am, in morning sunlight, as we waited to depart; bring Deet; malaria is on the mainland, and some cases may originate in the Bay islands; malaria prophylaxis is advised by the Center for Disease Control, but most tourists either don't know about it or don't do anything about it. . . Best dive season, people tell me, is March, April, May; worst November, December. . . Each hotel arranges side trips to Honduran ruins on the mainland. Reservations: any travel agent or Bayman Bay Club, 800/524-1823; 305/370-2120; FAX 305/370-2276; FAX 011-504-454-179; Posada Del Sol, 407/848-3483; 800/642-DIVE; 800/226-DIVE; FAX 407/624/3225 (FL); FAX 011-504-454-311; Nautilus Dive Resort, 1/800-535-7063; FAX 512-863-9079; 512/863/9097; 011-504-370-397.

Does Diving Drive You Crazy?

- -Psychotic aspects of DCS

During the past 10 years, our understanding of and the treatment for decompression sickness (DCS) have been gradually changing. There is increasing evidence that DCS primarily involves the central nervous system (CNS) and that pure Type I lesions are rare.

Some publications have alluded to the "punch-drunk" diver, and the late neuropsychological changes occurring with diving and DCS. If there are effects on neuropsychological functioning due to exposure over time to risks taken when diving, they are probably not large (at least in the short term) and probably only affect a few individuals.

There is no data available on the acute psychiatric or psychological manifestations of DCS, except perhaps the mention of personality changes noted with cerebral DCS. There are numerous anecdotal reports, particularly those associated with the abalone divers, that acute psychiatric changes occur.

I have talked with some of the shellers who remain in the boat while the diver is below. Their reports indicate that acute personality changes occur and these vary with the particular dive profile. The shellers could differentiate the depth of the dive on the mood and personality change seen in the abalone diver upon surfacing. These stories were so constant that one would have to assume that they are true. Acute confusional states were seen with deeper dives, while aggressive, abusive behavior was seen with the longer, shallower dive.

Recognizing Symptoms

There is often considerable delay between the onset of the symptoms of DCS and the actual time the diver presents himself for treatment. This delay is frequently attributed to:

- Ignorance of the meaning of the symptoms.
- Overindulgence in alcohol.
- Symptoms being blamed on a previous injury.
- Denial (the dive was well within the limits of the tables so the diver could not possibly be bent).
- Guilt (DCS is regarded in some circles as shameful as a sexually transmitted disease).

Failure to recognize that there is something wrong may, in fact, be a manifestation of the disease. Unrealistic, or in some instances, a paranoid reaction to the symptoms, may be part of the disease itself. This is sort of a "Catch-22". To recognize that one has DCS, one must recognize the symptoms. But a symptom of DCS is that one does not recognize that one has got it.

The Post DCS Blues and DCS Psychosis

Since joining the Hyperbaric Unit at the Royal

Adelaide Hospital, I have observed that most post-treatment patients go through a depressive phase, and that divers diagnosed as having cerebral DCS have a degree of psychosis, manifesting itself mainly by paranoid behavior. The following case histories will demonstrate this.

Case I: The Abusive Instructor

This 32-year-old diving instructor came to our department on September 27, 1989, after having been flown in from Darwin Hospital in a pressurized aircraft. He was agitated, irritable, slow and vague. He had poor short-term memory. He was extremely unstable on his feet.

The previous April he began working in the Maldives. He usually dived twice a day, 6 days a week. The first dive in the morning was to 20 or 30 meters for 50 to 60 minutes. The second dive was about 3 hours later and could be to 20 m. He used a Beuchat computer.

Occasionally, he had the afternoon off. He drank heavily. He played hard. The staff at the resort noticed a slow personality change. He became aggressive and abusive, not only towards the staff but also to the guests. He was told to stop drinking, which he did, at least one month prior to his departure from the island. His last dive was on the morning of the 14th of September. He does not know how he finished the dive. On ascent, he became extremely confused. He remembered falling over in the boat. He was put on a flight to Australia that day. His confusion worsened. He disembarked at Singapore and stayed there for a week. His girlfriend in Darwin reported receiving several distressing phone calls. She said his conversation was bizarre, vague and extremely slow. He finally arrived in Australia on the 22nd of September. Unable to fill in his Customs Declaration form, he was strip searched by Customs, as they suspected drugs. His girlfriend took him to Darwin Hospital where he was admitted to the psychiatric ward. They were unable to diagnose the problem, as his behavior was unlike anything they had seen. Then, finally, somebody found out that he had been a diving instructor. They contacted us and he was flown to Adelaide that day.

He received 10 hyperbaric treatments. He improved after each treatment, but even the optimists could never say that he was quite right. On the 10th of October, he had an acute paranoid psychotic reaction. At a major psychiatric hospital, he underwent a series of investigations and psychometric assessments. They concluded that he had a "neuropsychological profile that one would expect from a person suffering from hypoxia; probable cause, DCS."

Follow-up revealed a pleasant fellow, off all medications and able to return to work. He still had a moderate degree of memory deficit. Assessment had also revealed

frontal lobe impairment. However, it is expected that he will make some spontaneous improvement.

***“To recognize that one has DCS,
one must recognize the symptoms.
But a symptom of DCS is that
one does not recognize
that one has got it.”***

Case II: The Paranoid Father

This 31-year-old male made a dive to 20 meters with a “slow” rapid ascent. When he surfaced his symptoms were consistent with having suffered from a cerebral arterial gas embolism or cerebral DCS. He was told never to dive again. He waited for two years, then did four dives over two days. None were deeper than 15 meters. The bottom times were conservative and there were no rapid ascents. He surfaced from his last dive (to 10 m) with similar symptoms to his episode of two years earlier. He went home, deciding to sweat it out. He slept that night with his bed on blocks to elevate his feet. In the morning, his symptoms were a little worse. He contacted us. The diagnosis was made of cerebral DCS.

He was extremely aggressive and abusive with paranoid overtones. He made remarks like “What are the police divers doing here? Are they after me?” He later said that he could not stop these odd feelings. He had a frontal headache and was very unsteady. There was a short-term memory loss.

His treatment was successful, to a degree. Follow-up revealed a different person from the one who had been admitted. He was a gentle, caring father. He admitted to having had paranoid feelings, and also to having been extremely depressed. He said these feelings took about a month to disappear. He still complains of short-term memory loss and of being “slower” than he was before

this episode.

He will not be diving again.

Case III: The Depressed Swede

This Swedish tourist was treated at Townsville. She had been diagnosed as having had cerebral DCS. Although successfully treated clinically, she admitted to not feeling her normal self.

She was still slightly depressed, and said that this had gradually gotten better over the past couple of months. The interview also revealed that she had extreme paranoid feelings during treatment and just after. At that time, she did not like being alone because space creatures were going to get her. These creatures had been in a book that she had been reading when she went diving.

Conclusion:

Encephalopathies following organic illnesses are numerous: apathy, confusion, irritability, agitation, mania, hallucinations, delusions, anxiety and depression. But, perhaps clinically closest to what I have described here is puerperal psychosis, a brief psychological disturbance, typically one of depression, with confusion and thought disorders. Recovery takes time.

To be bent and not recognize it may in fact be an important diagnostic tool for cerebral DCS. The symptoms of DCS, which are obvious to us, may not be of importance to the diver because the various pathological processes involved alter perception. Reluctance to seek treatment may actually be part of the disease process due to specific CNS deficits. Indeed, aggressive, abnormal and paranoid behavior indicate significant CNS involvement.

A good clinical guide to a diver's well-being after DCS would be the diver's immediate family's assessment of when the diver is back to “normal” again. Unfortunately, this may never occur.

Dr. Chris Acott is attached to the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit, Department of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, Royal Adelaide Hospital, Adelaide, South Australia. The article is a revised transcript of a lecture given at the 1990 South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society Scientific Meeting.

From Ammo Boxes to Picnic Coolers:

—Solving the problem of schlepping photo gear

At the end of a photo-dive trip, I squeezed into my seat on a Miami-to-Chicago flight and discovered I was sitting next to an old friend with an ammo case clamped between her feet. So we struck up a conversation — about the ammo case.

That was a dozen years ago. What I learned on that flight has served as the basis for packing delicate photo equipment to this day. Lynn opened the beat-up olive

drab case and showed me four Nikonos cameras, several lenses, meters, and a couple of strobes, all jammed in with no padding at all.

The key to packing breakable equipment, I learned, was that everything must be packed so tightly that nothing shakes against anything else. Sure, a camera might be damaged if the case were dropped, but as ordinary carry-on luggage, each delicate item is protected by its neighbor

from shaking and, possibly, shattering.

Bags I Have Known (I've Tried Everything)

Before meeting Lynn and her ammo case, I had tried carrying equipment in every kind of container: Halliburton and Vivitar aluminum photo cases, Adapta fiber cases, Pelican waterproof cases, soft-sided carry-on bags, even a made-to-order professional case. The most practical was a giant tweed suitcase with a stainless steel frame. I liked it a lot, but it was so large that it practically took a derrick to lift it.

Today, my basement is filled with these near-useless protective containers, none of which solves the baggage problems of an underwater photo addict. The problems are: the steal-me syndrome, what to do with salt residue, damage caused by baggage handlers, and the inflexible and, I believe, unreasonable refusal of cases to adapt as my system grows.

The first camera luggage I purchased was touted to be the best case anywhere. My Zero Halliburton case is built from a tough aluminum alloy that, the advertising says, is nearly indestructible. Well, OK, but the combination lock rusted out. Besides, the cost of buying extra Halliburtons

became prohibitive as my camera collection grew. I switched to a cheaper metal case made by Vivitar. It dented a little, but at least the lock didn't rust.

By this time I had traveled to Belize and I watched a fellow photo diver attempt to fall on his dive knife after the photo cases he shipped as luggage were lost (read, "stolen") at the local airport. That's when I decided that any case that looked like it carried cameras was not for me. Into the basement went the Halliburton and Vivitar.

“ ...I watched a fellow photo diver attempt to fall on his dive knife after the photo cases he shipped as luggage were lost (read, “stolen”) at the local airport.”

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Equipment Problems Questionnaire

So that *Undercurrent* can continue to remain on top of problems occurring with diving equipment, we are including this brief questionnaire to help you inform us about any problem with your diving gear that might need attention by the manufacturer.

Too often, individual problems go unreported. Your assistance will help us see that we can uncover any shortcomings in specific pieces of equipment before they create problems for others.

1. What piece of equipment has had a problem: _____

2. Brand _____ Model # _____

3. Year purchased _____ Bought New Used

4. Number of dives using that piece of equipment _____

(Over Please)

For awhile I carried my growing collection onto the plane and stowed everything above and below my seat. This was my Adapta and Pelican case phase. Great containers, they are tough and fairly lightweight.

But flight attendants did not like me. "Check them as baggage?" they smiled. I rarely was forced to do so, but today, airlines enforce strict carryon rules.

And why waterproof seals on Pelican and Underwater Kinetics cases? The cameras, housings and strobes they carry are themselves waterproof.

Even more important for hard case users is how to prevent wet and salty photo gear from contaminating those great-fitting foam compartments. The only method I know is to delay packing equipment until you have rinsed and cleaned it on shore. Which means that at trip's end you return to shore with your scuba equipment in one hand, wet photo gear in the other hand, and that empty — and now useless — photo case in your third hand.

Most important, don't even think of carrying a topside camera in the same case in which you store wet and salty equipment. Your prize camera or camcorder is a sure bet for repair when you return home.

"The ingenious diver who first discovered the picnic cooler should be ranked as one of the greats in dive history."

The Cooler (Better) Solution

The ingenious diver who first discovered the picnic cooler should be ranked as one of the greats in dive history. Probably someone who learned that coolers were handy for storing or carrying other delicate equipment. Or packed a cooler with scuba equipment, sat on it while donning a wetsuit, then, at the end of the dive, rinsed everything in the cooler.

When I am not traveling I store most of my photo and video equipment in the same seven coolers I use for photo

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Equipment Problems Questionnaire (cont.)

5. What was the problem? (Be as specific as possible)

6. How did it affect the dive?

7. Were you or anyone else injured because of the problem? Yes No

8. If yes, please describe the injury

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expeditions: 1) cameras, lenses, and trays; 2) accessory and closeup/macro lenses; 3) & 4) strobes; 5) video camcorders and housings; 6) video lights; and 7) tools. For teaching on dive trips, I add three more cases: 1) camera housings; 2) & 3) film processing and video editing equipment.

What to Get

I remember when plastic was the stuff of cheap toys that broke as soon as you pulled them from the box. Not anymore.

The Coleman Company remembers, too. Twenty-five years ago, most Coleman coolers were made of metal; now only three models are. Coleman builds all but its largest plastic coolers from a high density polyethylene exterior and liner separated by a thick layer of rigid polyurethane insulation.

The trouble with metal coolers is that their bottoms are made of plastic that disintegrates over time much more quickly than plastic coolers. The reason, a Coleman spokesman theorizes, is that the greater weight of the metal top and sides creates more stress on the plastic base. And anyway, the metal corrodes for us divers; plastic does not.

Traditionally, manufacturers rate the size of coolers by the number of quarts they hold. In plastic, Coleman starts with a mini 5-quart model, then ranges upwards in sizes of 8, 16, 18, 24, 28, 34, 40, 48, 54, 60, 100, and 150 quarts.

Two other manufacturers, Rubbermaid and Gott (also distributed under the Rubbermaid brand), build similar sizes. At the upper end, Gott heaves in a 172-quart monster, the kind you find aboard fishing boats.

Three sizes make sense for carrying underwater photo or video equipment, 54-quart, 68-quart, and 100-quart. Latest prices at a local Sportmart are \$34.87, \$48.56, and \$79.95, respectively. Buy one of each and they cost less than one average-sized Halliburton case. The 100-quart model is far larger than the standard Pelican that costs at least that much.

For underwater photo buffs, the 54-quart variety is best. Its inside dimensions are 20-1/2 inches long, 11 inches from front to back, and 13-1/2 inches deep. It easily holds and protects a Nikonos and strobe. It also will hold a regulator, mask, and gauges. There is probably room to hold even more.

Most of my coolers are Coleman 68-quart models. Inside dimensions are 25-1/2 inches long, 13 inches from front to back, and 13-1/2 inches deep. The extra five inches of length and two inches from front to back add enough room to pack more than a dozen cameras plus associated lenses, meters, and brackets. (You can pack so much stuff that you pay a penalty at the airport if it weighs more than 70 pounds; and packages greater than 70 pounds won't be shipped by UPS.)

The 100-quart model is a mini-monster, perfect for camera and/or camcorder housings. For those who prefer housed cameras or camcorders, its 35-1/2 inch x 13 inch x

Picnic Coolers as Rescue Devices

Last summer 150 miles from their home port of Crystal River, Florida, two commercial fishermen survived for five days adrift on a raft fashioned from three picnic coolers after their ship sank.

They survived on water and peanut butter they salvaged from their sinking ship. Both suffered from dehydration and exposure, and one had a shark bite on his lower abdomen.

13-1/2 inch inside dimensions hold one large and two small housings, plus a tackle box of parts, and one or two video lights. All this weighs between 60 and 70 pounds when everything is packed in.

The handles on Coleman coolers are great for picnics, but they aren't designed for the abuse of baggage handlers who yank them off with ease. Gott extends the end walls of their coolers and molds handles into them but this makes the cases more difficult to get through doorways and also to store.

A simple solution to Coleman's handle problem is to remove them from the get go. Then loop a length of clothesline through holes in the cooler's supports. To make carrying easier on your hands, slip a short length of half-inch PVC tubing over the line.

Packing

My favorite act at the circus is the routine in which clowns seem to pour out of an old Volkswagen forever. My image is of assistants backstage stuffing them in one after another. "Do you think we can get in another?" asks one. "I don't know," answers his buddy. "Looks full to me, but let's try anyway." And they squeeze in another clown. Substitute cameras and sponge for clowns, and you are ready to pack a cooler.

Use upholstery foam from a fabric supply store. Get slabs of varying thickness, from 1/2-inch to 3-inch. You could use sponge; it lasts longer than foam and is available in several densities and shapes. Egg crate sponge is popular, but foam is less expensive and may be easier to find than sponge.

Prepare the cooler with a layer of sponge two inches thick on the bottom and one inch thick on all sides. If you pack weights for a camcorder housing, for example, lay them under the bottom foam.

Delicate items require extra preparation. If it's a lens, make sure it is capped front and back, then slip it into a plastic refrigerator bag and finally into an old sock.

Disconnect removable cables from electrical equipment. Otherwise the wires may kink and break inside the cables during packing and shipping.

Remove batteries from strobes and lights. Otherwise a baggage gremlin may switch them on, so the plastic lens of your video light bulges out like a grapefruit — or worse yet, is exploded by the gas from a nicad battery pack. And while you are at it, remove bulbs from flashlights and video lights to prevent them from being jarred. Wrap them gently in soft handkerchiefs, then pack them in the cooler separately.

If you bring a housing, disassemble it as much as you can. But don't remove controls; the glands may leak when you put it back together. Wrap housing handles and other small parts in thin sponge and old socks, then pack them in the housing itself.

Now forget everything your parents taught you about neatness. The secret of safe stuffing is to arrange equipment so everything fits loosely together. If everything looks jumbled and in no particular order, you probably have it right.

Put the heaviest and largest items in first. With a bread knife, cut foam chunks and slabs and insert them between every surface, making sure nothing rattles. Cover the first layer of items with a layer of 1-inch foam. The second layer will take up less volume, because the items are smaller. To complete the job, insert small pieces, such as lenses, in corners and remaining open spaces. If you don't have anything left to pack, stuff in sponge, wadded up towels, or even socks, underwear, jeans — clothes you will wear and don't mind if they wrinkle.

Mainly, make sure nothing rattles

You may be able to keep things slightly organized with one or two partitions. Cut a piece of 1/4-inch plywood to fit the cooler from front to back. Line the partitions with foam in the same manner as the walls of the cooler.

When everything is in place, drop the lid. It should remain open about two inches. The foam's resilience

allows the lid to close completely so everything stays snugly compressed and nothing moves.

Duct tape is the usual method of sealing coolers. You can attach a couple of locks and hasps to each side, but they may pull loose unless you screw the hardware into the plastic carefully. Coolers that display locks also look like they contain important equipment, an attraction to the larcenous heart. The only question my taped coolers draws is what kind of fish they carry.

Seal your cooler with a combination of duct tape and packing tape. Duct tape conforms to the cooler's curves, but it isn't dependable in hot, sticky weather. Humidity penetrates the tape's weave and may loosen the adhesive. Two-inch-wide packing tape sticks best, but is difficult to seal to rounded surfaces.

With a tape dispenser, run two or three bands of packing tape up one side, across the top and all the way down the other side. This holds the lid down. Now run a strip of duct tape around the entire lid where it meets the top. Identify the cooler with your name and address and tape it in place with a strip of clear packing tape (seal a second ID inside the cooler).

You are ready to travel. One more thing: don't forget to carry extra tape and your dispenser for the trip home.

When you return from the trip, remove all but the bottom sponge and leave your equipment right there. The cooler stores easily on the floor of a closet and is ready when you need a camera and strobe for another photo or video trip.

It is a long trip from an ammo case to a picnic cooler, but the principle is the same: safe travel for your camera. So enjoy the trip. By packing in a cooler, you will have a picnic.

The author, Dick Jacoby, has taught underwater photography for 21 years. Once in a while, he teaches in tropical water, but he returns to the Midwest because he doesn't want to get spoiled. He lives near Chicago.

A Final Word or Two

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