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# paradise

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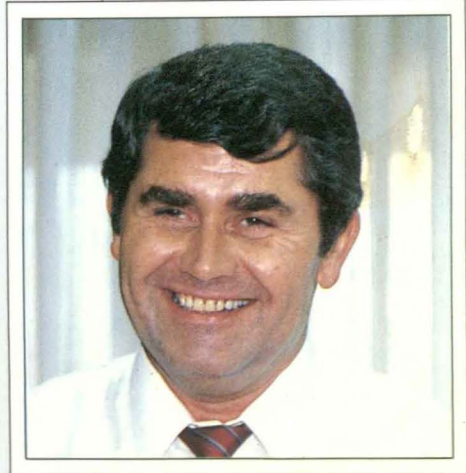
A world of exquisite beauty and color exists in the waters of Papua New Guinea. Plants and fish of great diversity thrive amongst the coral reefs that hug the shores and line the bays of our coasts. The reefs are a permanent home for much of our aquatic life and predators from deeper waters are constant visitors.

Unique and accessible, Papua New Guinea's waters attract marine scientists and scuba divers from around the world.

In this issue we visit some of the best dive spots, a few of them famous for the sunken remains of battleships and warplanes, and we experience some of the natural wonders of marine life.

Enjoy your trip.

Dieter Seefeld  
Chief Executive & General Manager  
Air Niugini



Dieter Seefeld  
Chief Executive & General Manager  
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**Cover:** Walindi Plantation Diving Resort offers endless undersea exploration in Kimbe Bay (see page 37).  
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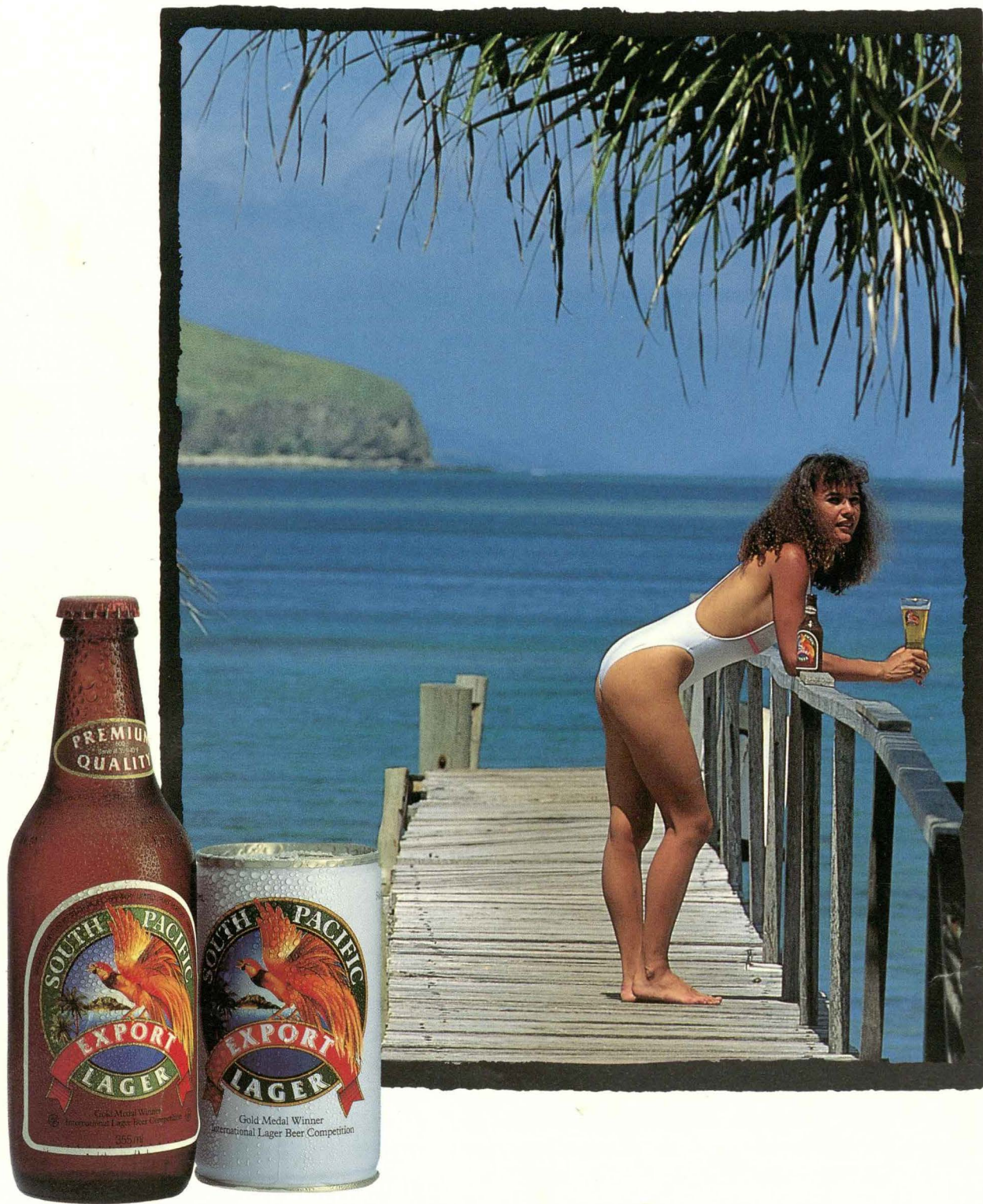
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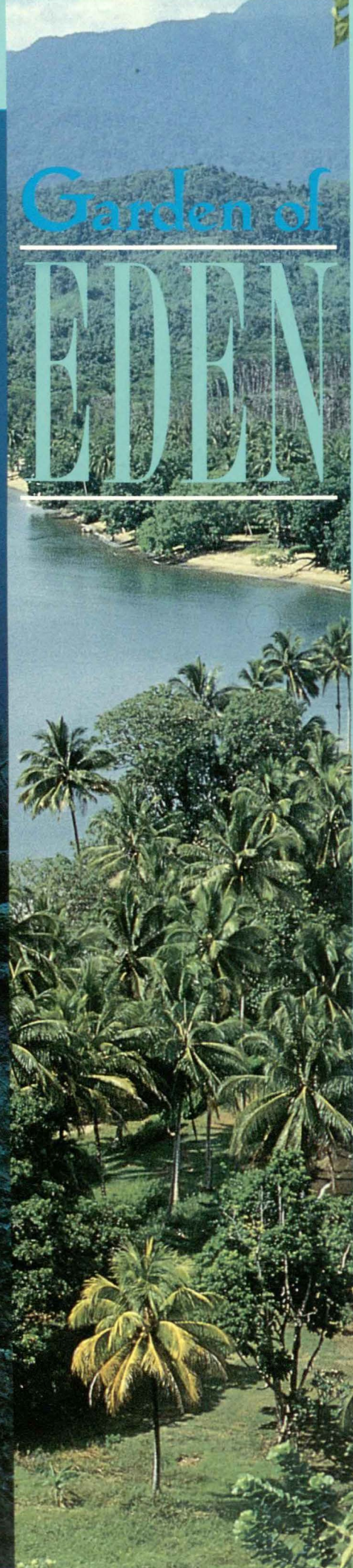
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**Below** Giant vase sponge on Sheila's Reef. **far right** Part of Salamaua's peninsula, seen from the headland. **inset** Spectacularly colored anemone fish are also called clown fish.

# Garden of EDEN



Story and photographs by Tony Karacsonyi





**Background** Salamaua's peninsula. **left** Gorgonia fans at Halfway Reef. **top right** Salamauan girls pause on the way home from school. **centre right** Pink tubular sponges on Sheila's Reef. **bottom right** MV Barbarian.





Imagine an undersea pinnacle rising from the depths to within 26 metres of the ocean's surface, the peak a Garden of Eden of marine life, some of it of gigantic proportions.

The place exists and is known as Halfway Reef, lying halfway between Lae and Salamaua in the Huon Gulf on the north coast of Papua New Guinea. It was discovered accidentally by Rod Pearce, the owner-skipper of the diving charter vessel *Barbarian* and proprietor of the Salamaua Divers Lodge.

As we descended, the top few metres of water were murky due to river runoff. Suddenly the water changed to a clear inky blue and we beheld a breathtaking scene. Tan and purple soft corals stood two metres high, like trees in a forest, while others, riddled with featherstars, spread horizontally across the reef. To touch the bottom here is to touch living things, as the entire peak is covered in rich green algae, soft and hard corals. A mammoth basket sponge towered almost three metres high and one-and-a-half metres in diameter. As Linda Kavanagh stood beside the sponge on her fin tips the sponge still towered above her. Had she taken off her tank she could easily have fitted inside.

From this remarkable sponge, Rod led us over Halfway's sheer walls to see the 'hanging gardens' at 39 metres. These gardens of gorgonia fans dribbling from the overhangs had the grandeur of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

It is hard to believe that Salamaua was once the scene of fierce warfare between Japanese and Allied forces during World War II. The area was captured by the Japanese in 1942 later to be reclaimed by Allied troops, with heavy losses on both sides. The jungle has now hidden many of the war's scars but several anti-aircraft guns remain on Salamaua's headland, one near the school house and the other in the heart of the local village.

Salamaua is an ideal destination for novice divers. Rod and Linda carefully lead them so that by the end of their stay they are confidently diving to 40 metres.

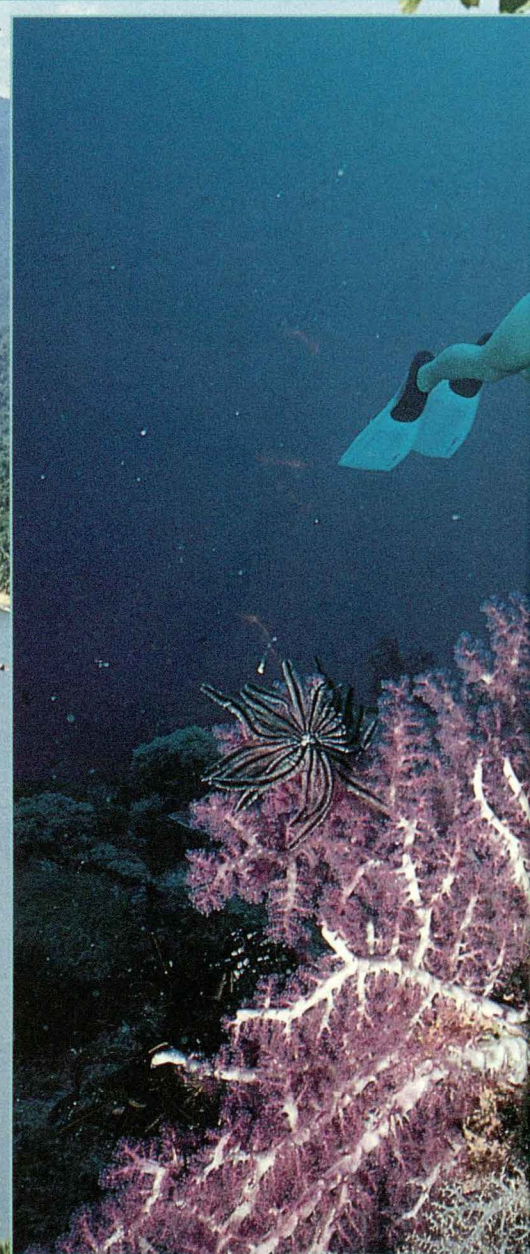




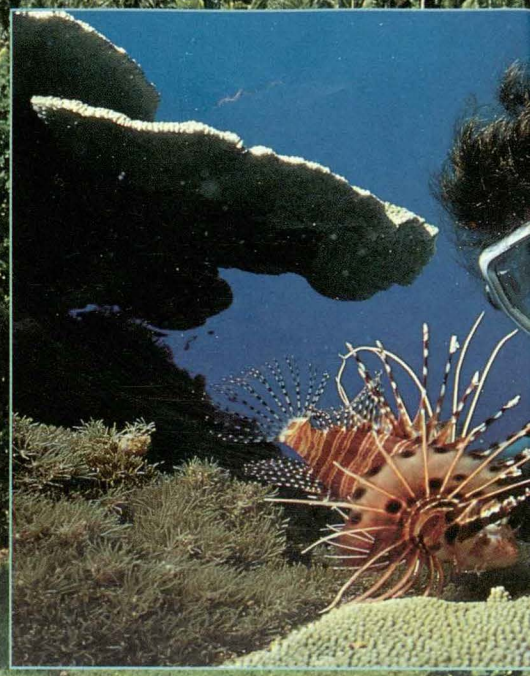
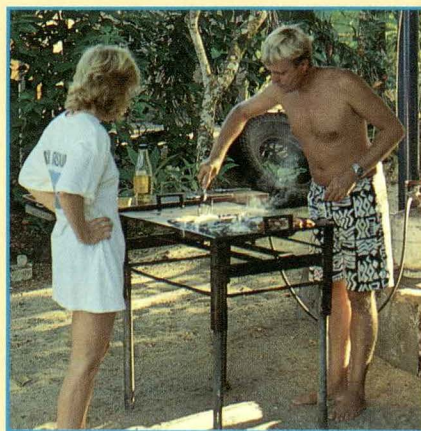
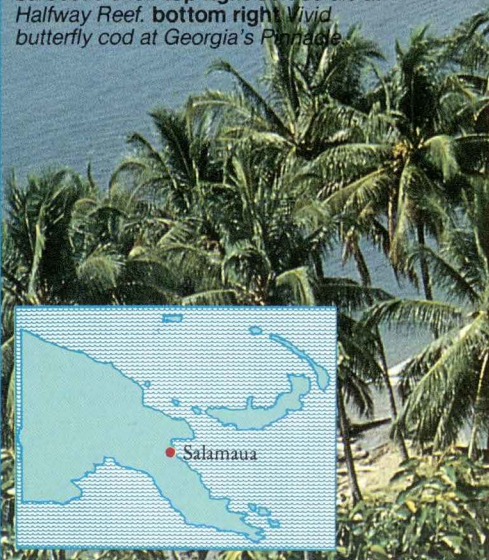
Sheila's Reef was one of our first dives, where Rod could assess individual abilities. Little did we know this was a world class reef. The plateau at 21 metres was covered in beds of whip gorgonia in full white polyp bloom, gorgonia fans, large delicate vase sponges, all of which were heavily laden in crinoids. Purple soft corals leaned like streamers in the current and elegant fairy basslets hovered over a coral head, creating a beautiful scene.

We later dived Sheila's Reef to 36 metres specifically to photograph a single gorgonia fan whose dimensions were staggering. At four metres long and two metres high it was the largest one my dive buddy, Heather, and I had ever seen. Its lip was laden with crinoids and curled over slightly with the current like a huge orange wave. Heather swam into its curl where her entire body length was framed.

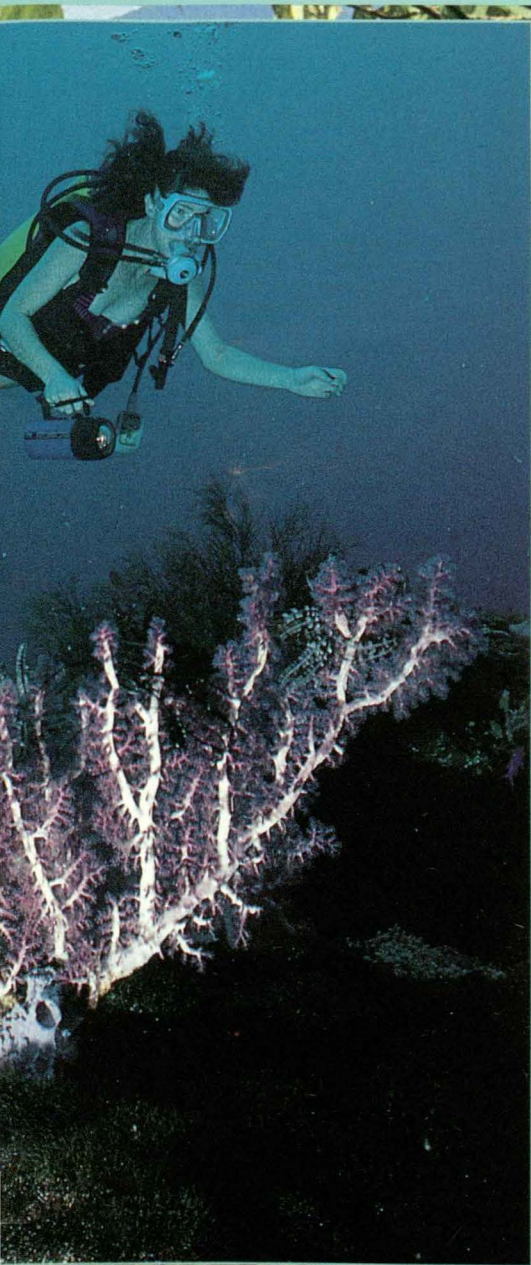
There are many other spectacular sites in the area including Georgia's Pinnacle, with some large growth and pelagic fish species but lacking the absolute splendor of Halfway Reef. Sheperton Shoals is a reef plateau and a melting pot of fish species including some large silver trevally. The Beacon, another site, was sheltered and close to the lodge. We found it to be a photographer's paradise with plenty of hard coral, black coral bushes, and anemones with commensal shrimps at depths of one metre to 25 metres.



**Above** A leisurely decompression stop at Sheperton Shoals. **right** Ron Pearce, host and dive guide, doubles as barbecue chef. **top right** Soft corals at Halfway Reef. **bottom right** Vivid butterfly cod at Georgia's Pinnacle.







Snorkelling just outside the lodge was also fascinating. Here we found black diadema urchins with electric blue markings. Swimming vertically among one of the urchin's spines was a razor fish. Its transparent body with black stripe was a perfect camouflage.

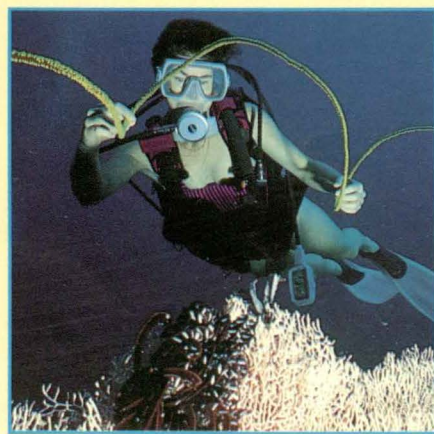
Dolphins can often be seen from the verandah of the lodge porpoising in the shimmer of the flat sea and orcas inhabit the waters about Salamaua during April and May.

Salamaua impressed us with its raw beauty; its steep mountainous shores draped in green jungle falling into the still ocean to be met by hard coral reef; frigate birds soaring high in the sky; the drone of cicadas through the hot humid days and birds calling from coconut palms. Salamaua is the doorstep to some of the world's great diving sites.

Air Niugini operates regular services between Port Moresby and Lae.

Dive Adventures Australia arrange diving holidays to the Salamaua Divers Lodge.

**Right** Part of Salamaua's peninsula. below Flowering seawhips.





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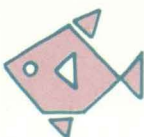
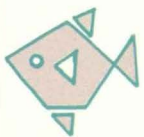
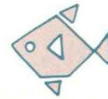
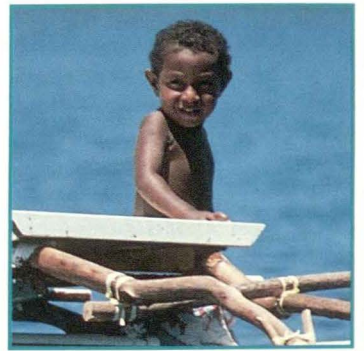
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# MARINE MECCA

Story by Nigel Stobbs Photographs by Charles Arneson



Of all the spectacular diving destinations in PNG, Madang may qualify as the most colorful and carefree. The diversity of its marine environment attracts tourists and scientists from all over the globe. It has attractions to satisfy every diver's interests; wrecks, soft corals and fans of breathtaking beauty, kilometres of vertical coral dropoffs and every kind of fish life. All this is only minutes from the shore.

One of the most popular sites for visiting divers is the aptly named Barracuda Point where there are often swarms of large pelagic fish. The site's namesake can often be seen here in vast numbers — huge schools of barracuda, slowly spiralling in the gentle currents. Up to a metre long, they can cause apprehension when they approach, but divers soon relax as the barracuda circle slowly, apparently fascinated by exhaled air bubbles.

The immense variety of smaller and more colorful fish holds special attraction for photographers and marine biologists for whom Madang is a marine Mecca. New species of nudibranch and anemone fish have been discovered here and their portraits have graced the pages of the world's most prestigious publications. Much of the photographing of these smaller fish and of the coral life is done at night, when the reefs of Madang explode into brilliant colors. The warm, tropical waters and calm seas make night

Above Feather starfish adorn branches of a sea fan. inset Madang resident.



diving a pleasant new experience for many divers used to less accommodating weather.

Madang's great underwater attraction is the wreck of the MV Coral Queen. This old coastal freighter lies in 30 metres of water just inside the barrier reef and is home to a giant school of flashlight fish. These strange creatures get their name from bioluminescent bacteria which live in a special gland just below the eye. They glow with neon-like intensity that give the fish the appearance of a tiny, underwater star. Thousands of these fish often gather in a school to produce a startling effect.

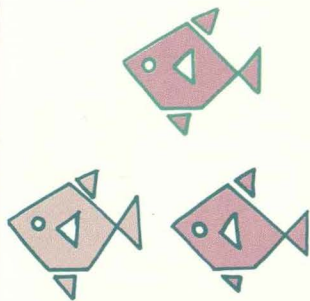
Descending into the hold of the Coral Queen is a disconcerting experience at first because it must be done in total darkness, without the aid of a torch. The flashlight fish is very light sensitive and will 'switch off' at the slightest hint of an external light. At the bottom of the hold, a giant dizzying vortex of pulsating lights begins to revolve and swarm. The fish swim in among the divers, outlining them with their eerie luminescence.

After exploring the hold and cabins, the divers usually sit on the rail below the ship's mast and watch as the school of flashlight fish ascend from the inky depths of the hold in a swirling, incandescent globe. Their combined light is so strong it outlines features of the vessel. The flashlight fish are joined by streams of other fish pouring out of every hatchway and porthole, circling the ship in one final performance before moving off towards the distant reef to feed. Witnessing this dazzling spectacle is not to be missed if looking for something out of the ordinary in a diving vacation.

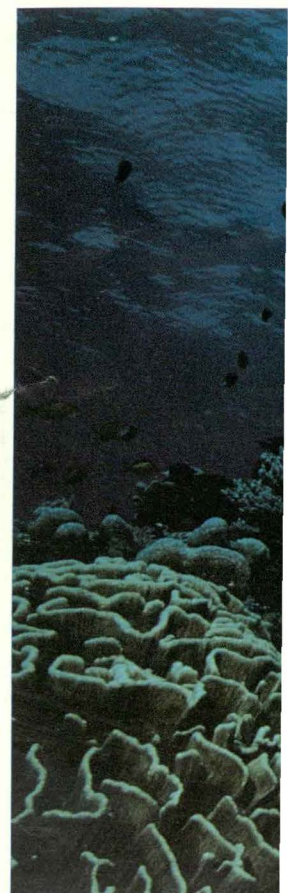
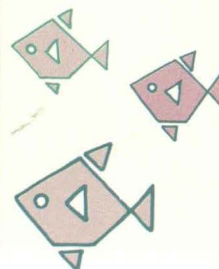
For the more adventurous diver, Madang also has its share of locations where sharks can usually be spotted. Premier among these is the lonely sea mount called Planet Rock. Lying several kilometres off shore and



**Above** Visibility is great in Madang waters. **right** Flashlight fish glow in the dark. **below** Bull shark patrols Magic Passage.



**Right** Colorful small fish abound on the reefs. **top right** Aptly named solitary coral. **centre right** Barracuda schooling at Barracuda Point.

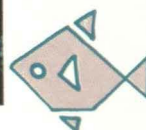
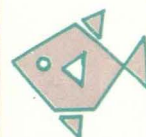
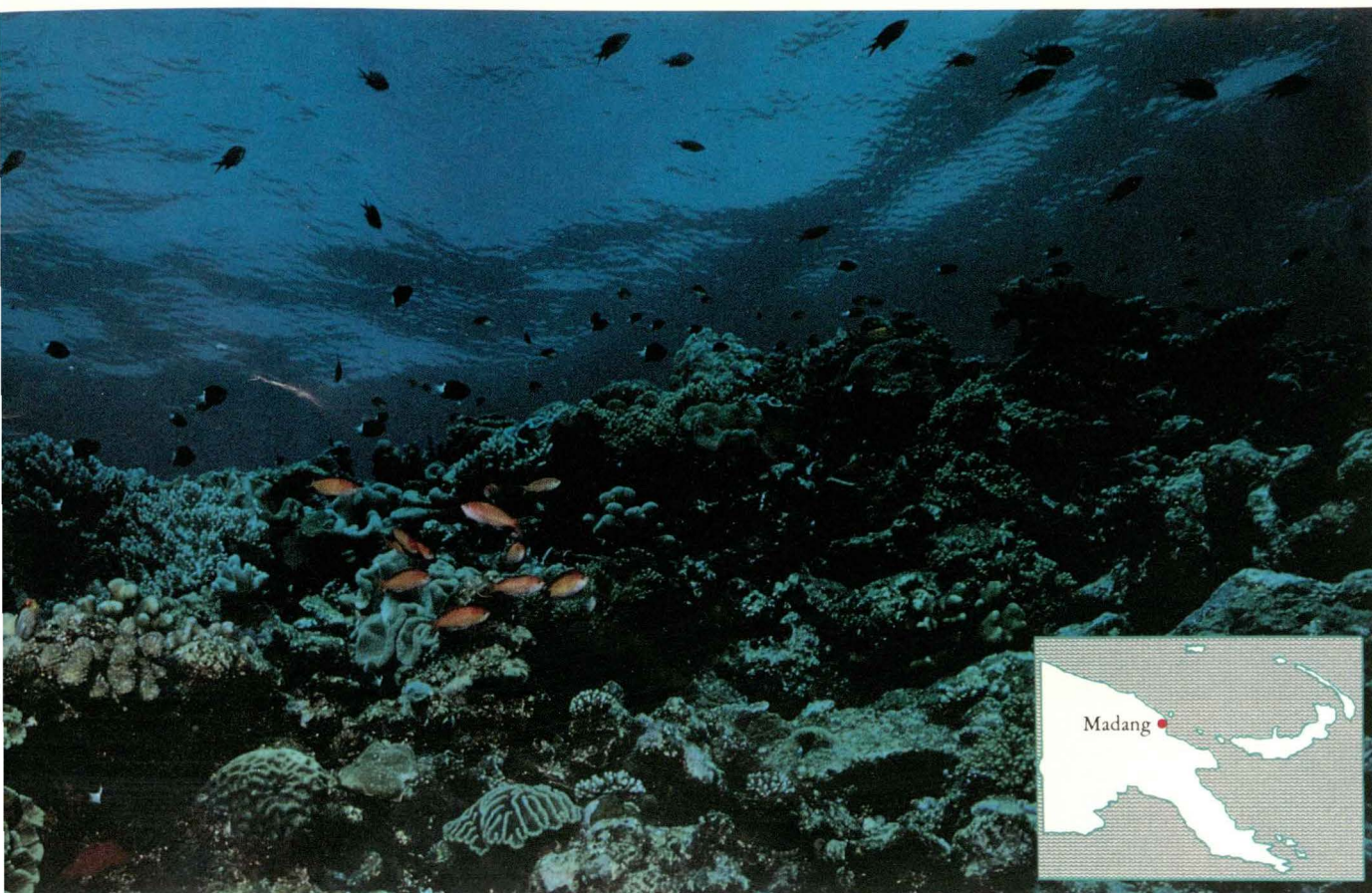
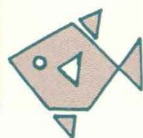
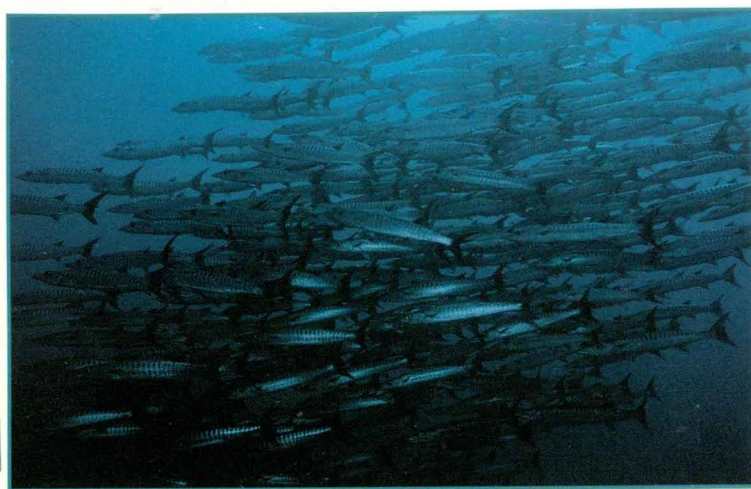
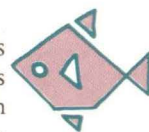




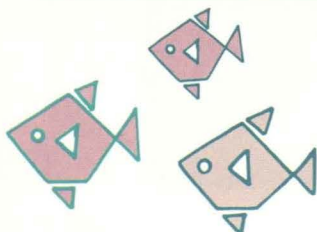
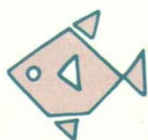
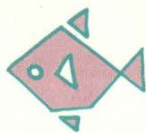
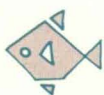
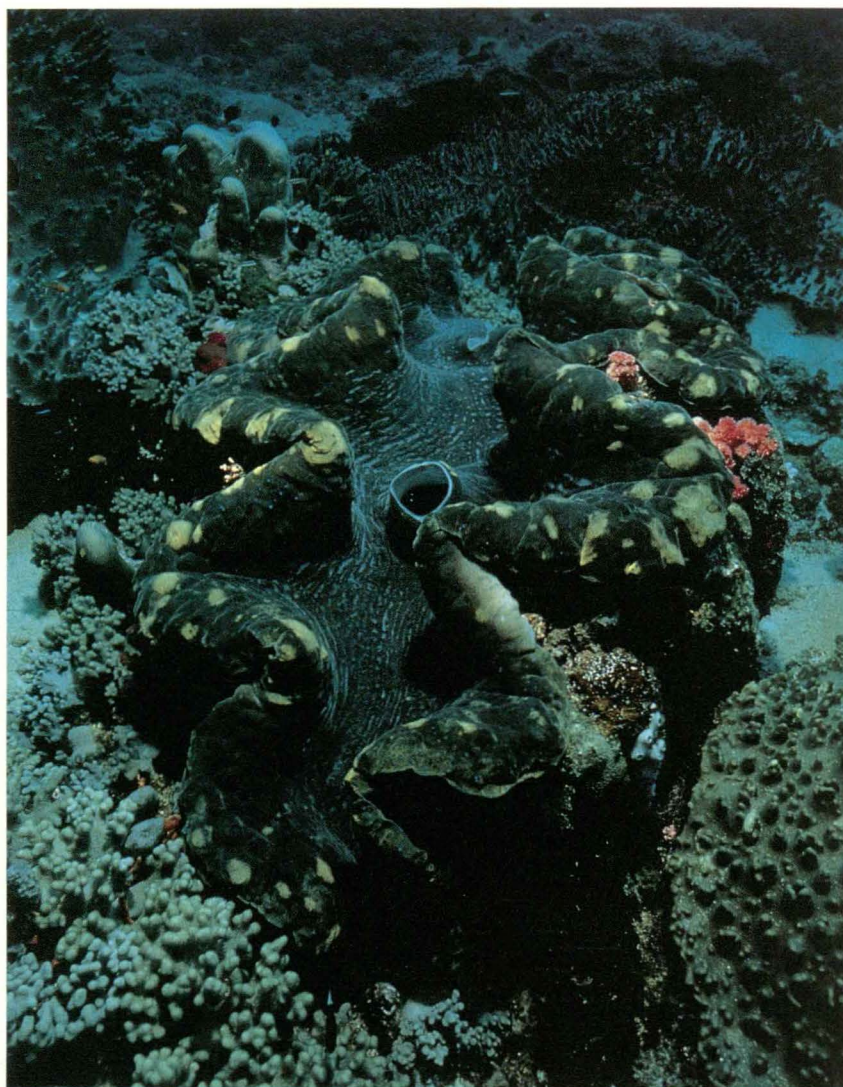
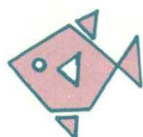


well beyond the barrier reef, this near vertical pinnacle ascends from a depth measured in hundreds of metres to just three metres below the surface.

Powerful ocean currents swirl around the rock. Large predatory fish glide gracefully into view at every turn. Many species of shark, from the common white tipped and grey reef sharks to the occasional hammerhead and tiger sharks,







**Top** Protected giant clams are making a comeback from over harvesting. **above left** A turtle traverses Magic Passage. **right** A shy coral garden dweller.

can be seen here.

The rock is also a hunting ground for black marlin and sailfish; this makes it a popular spot for game fishermen too. The hard corals that cover the surface of the rock are also home to varieties of moray eel.

The most popular dive site is the superb Magic Passage. This is a 30-metre deep passage carved through the barrier reef, through which strong currents flow at the change of tides. From one side of the passage to the other is perhaps 35-metres and on a good day divers can see right across, the clear water packed with fish of every type and size.

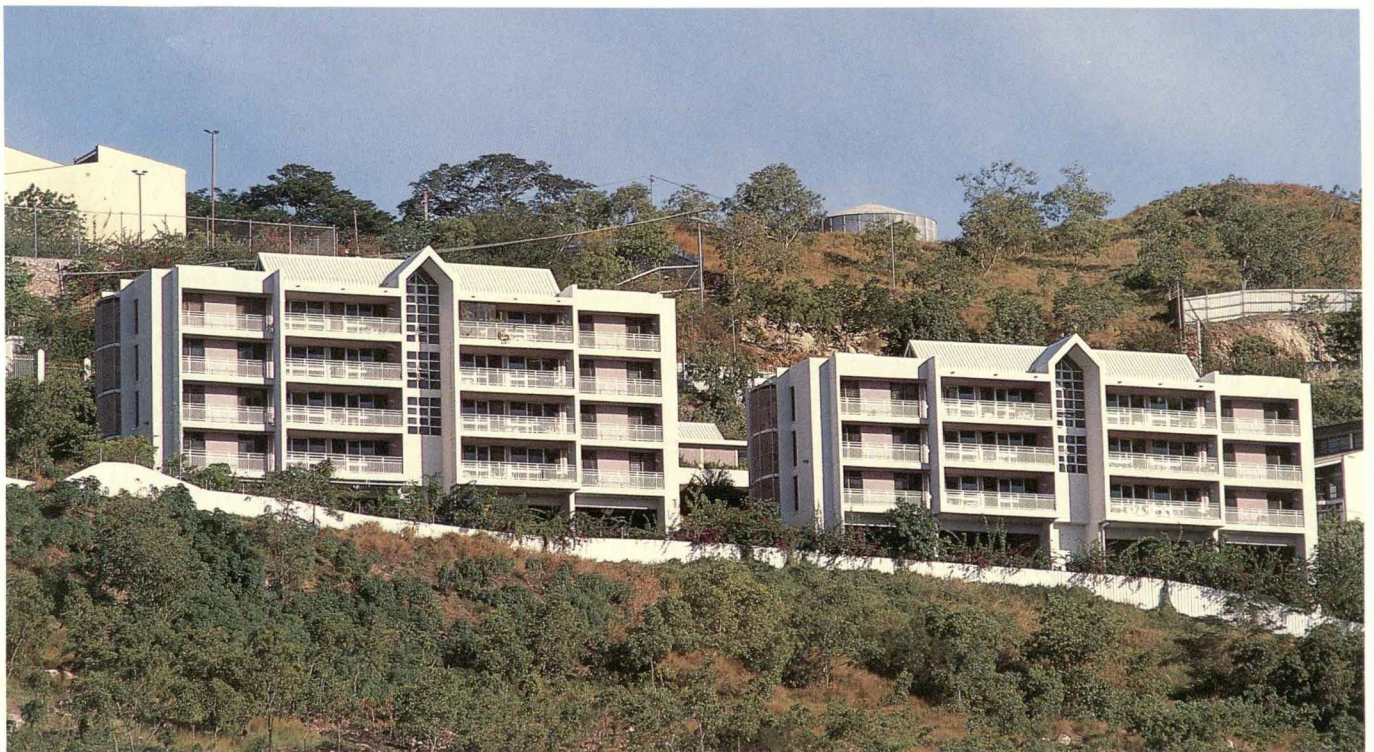
As divers swim along the bottom of the passage, masses of rainbow fish can cloud their vision momentarily. Then large silvery torpedo bodies of spanish mackerel can flick menacingly among them. Colorful schools dart through the brilliant blue orb of the passage's mouth. One never knows what is going to come swimming into that giant maw! I have seen schools of manta ray, giant hawksbill turtles, groupers and often a lone silvertip shark cruising in with the tide. There is a large path of sea whips conveniently located at the mouth of the passage so divers can take a rest from swimming against the current, just hanging on suspended while watching the show.

Words and pictures can portray only a fraction of the exotic marine wonders that Madang has to offer. Even people who have dived here for years sometimes have to pinch themselves and ask whether what they are seeing is real. But it all really does exist.

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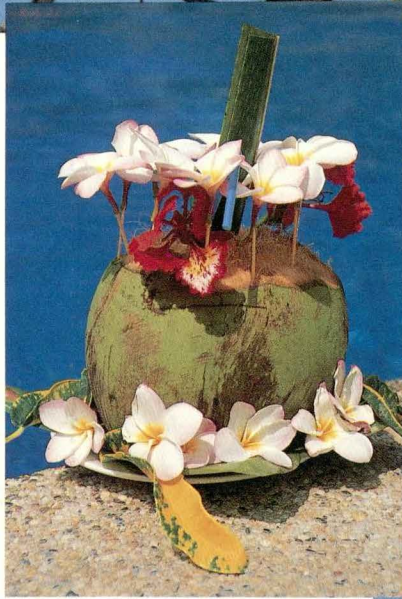
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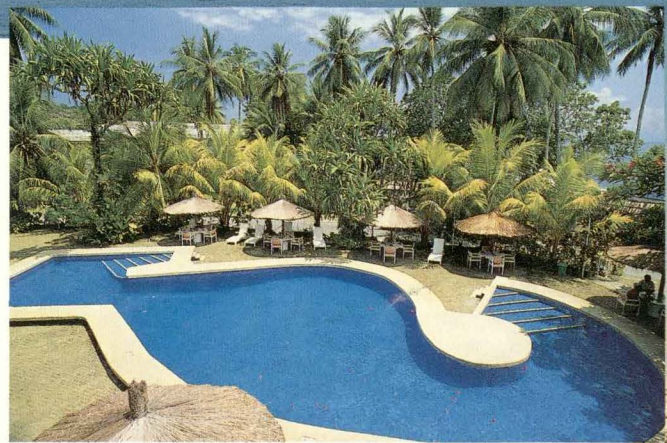
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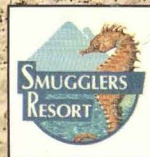
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# T H E TAKUBAR H U L K

Story and photographs by Peter Miller



**Above** Takubar hulk divers have an easy shore entry. **below** Henrietta Kikuchi and lion fish on the wreck.

Rabaul is famous for its Japanese World War II wreck diving attractions. The calm, clear waters are the grave for the remains of more than 50 vessels sunk by Allied bombing. Some sank in deep water where they remain eerily intact. Many, closer to shore, were almost totally destroyed and are now barely recognisable as ships. Time and marine growth have permanently altered their resemblance to anything nautical. One such shallow wreck is that of the Japanese freighter-transport the Kinkasan Maru.

On a recent trip to Rabaul, we drove 30 kilometres out of town along the winding, shore-hugging south coast road. On the way we stopped several times to explore Japanese wartime tunnel systems and to



absorb the splendid harbor views. We were also constantly returning the friendly greetings of villagers along the road.

A short distance past Kokopo and the Vunapope Mission we stopped at a sandy beach at a place called Takubar. The setting was delightful, providing a view of the offshore islands and Rabaul's ominous volcanoes in the distance. The blue water sparkled in the afternoon sunshine as our party prepared equipment under the shade of towering coconut palms. Underwater, we moved over a gently sloping bottom and were surprised to encounter immediately the broken hulk of the Kinkasan Maru lying on her port side, partially buried in the sandy slope and unexpectedly close to shore.

The stern end of the twisted



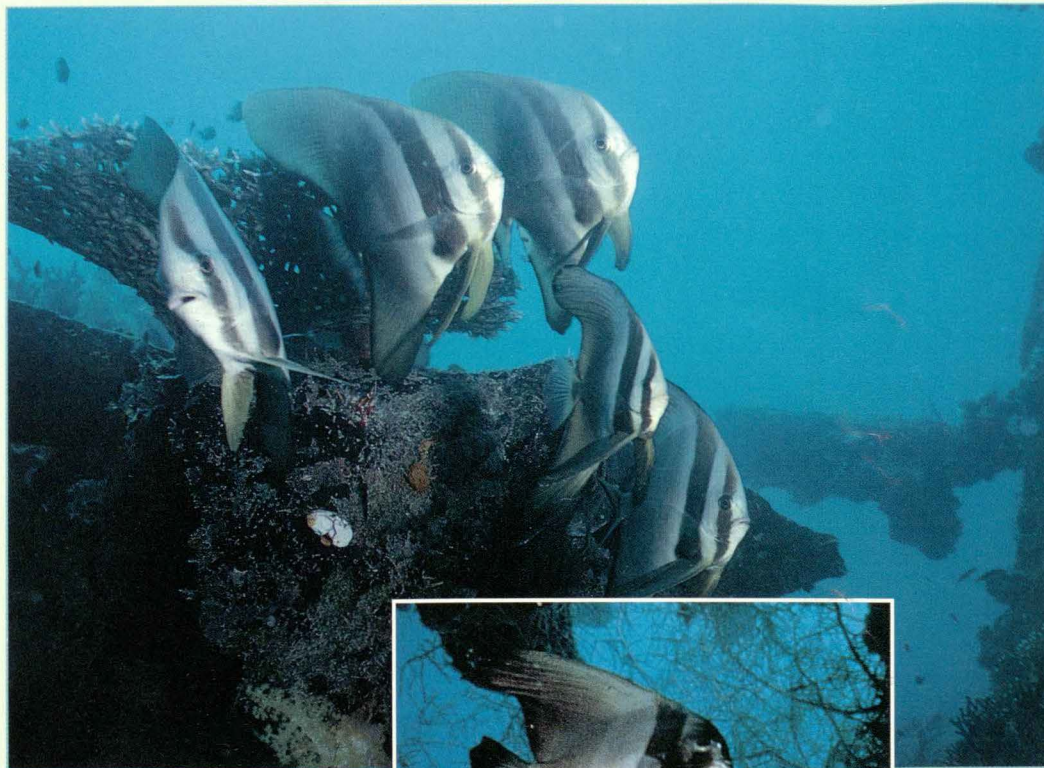
structure comes to within a metre of the surface. The deepest section lies in 18 metres. The hulk now has a permanent 'crew' of thousands of tropical fish including eels, shrimp and shellfish. Above the wreck, a constant parade of pelagic fish patrol like a protective squadron.

The warm, shallow water with plenty of natural light is most appreciated by photographers. The conditions allow divers plenty of time on the bottom from each tank of air.

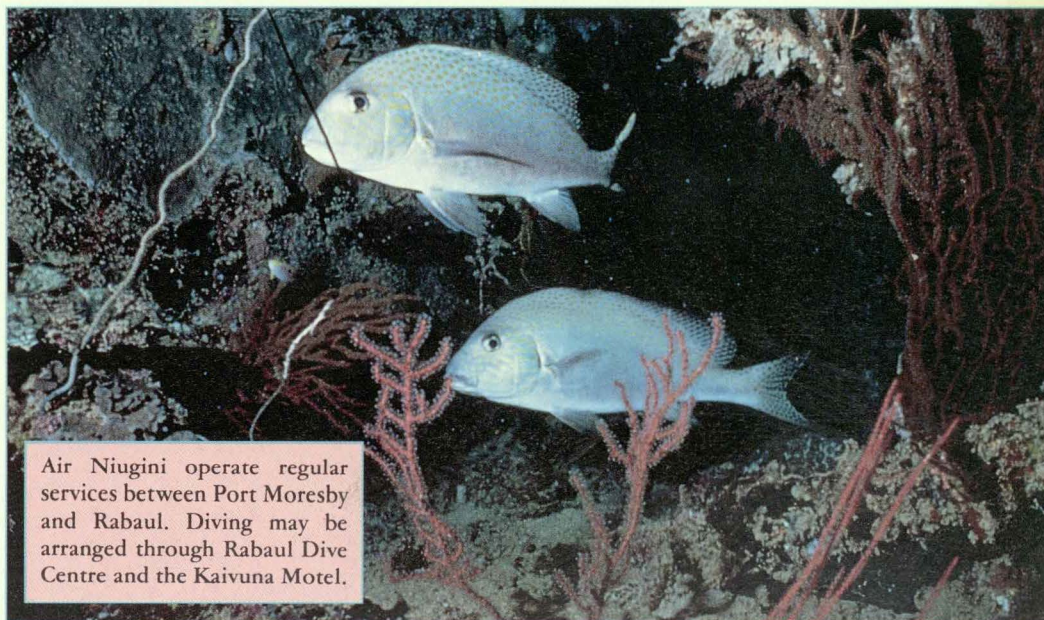
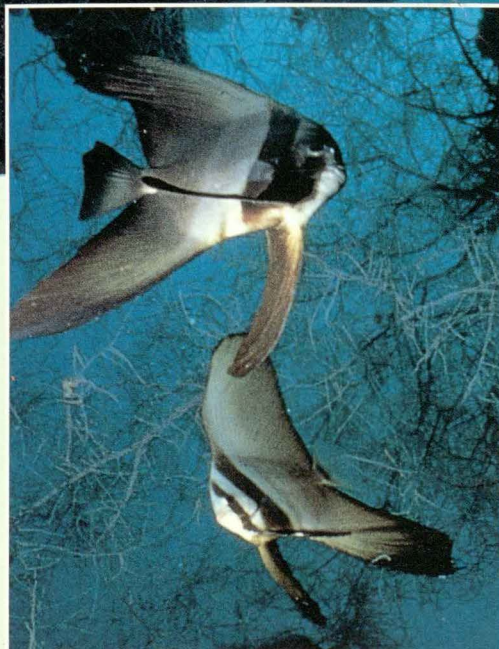
Divers new to the site take some time to orient themselves and to envisage the proud ship before her destruction. The Kinkasan Maru was a large vessel which invites thorough investigation. It is a delight for novices who want to try out new wreck diving skills. The amazing aspect is the new life that has developed around war-time carnage and debris. The fish corals, shifting sands and relentless water have gradually transformed the Kinkasan Maru. The rusty hulk has become coral encrusted and alive with marine animals.

It is not surprising that the Kinkasan Maru is so badly damaged. She was anchored very close to shore, off-loading supplies to a beach depot. Locals claim her cargo was almost exclusively saki: perhaps to keep the spirits of the troops high! Research shows that the vessel was sunk during a daring bomber raid on October 18, 1943, by six unescorted Mitchell B25s of the 500th Bombardment Squadron from the 345th American Air Force Bombardment Group. Two 1000-pound bombs exploded in the 4981-tonne ship. Credit for the sinking went to bombers piloted by Lt Max H. Mortenson and Lt Raymond E. Geer. The first won a Distinguished Flying Cross and the latter an Air Medal for their valiant participation in that successful raid.

There are many unknown and yet-to-be-discovered war-time hulks in the waters of PNG. They bear mute testimony to the death and destruction of war.



**Above and right** Bat fish inhabit the wreck of the Kinkasan Maru. **below** Sweetlips share the wreck with many other species.



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# Milne Bay

## Meander

Story and photographs by Lyn and Pat Manly



This trip was turning out to be everything just about everyone dreams of — jungle-clad islands, swaying palm trees on pristine white sand beaches, gently lapped by sapphire-colored seas. Think of postcard scenes of golden sunsets, idyllic island villages and laughing dark-skinned children. Throw in the exhilaration of sailing, of running before the wind and hitting 14 knots, the sails vivid white against a blue sky. Sheer bliss.

Above Catamaran Taleo Tambu (Sacred to the Wind), below Guests get their turn at the helm.





Imagine days of snorkelling, scuba diving and fishing and at day's end anchoring in a quiet lagoon; greeting villagers in outrigger canoes, trading for seashells and fruits, forgetting that only a few days ago life was as frantic as big city living decreed.

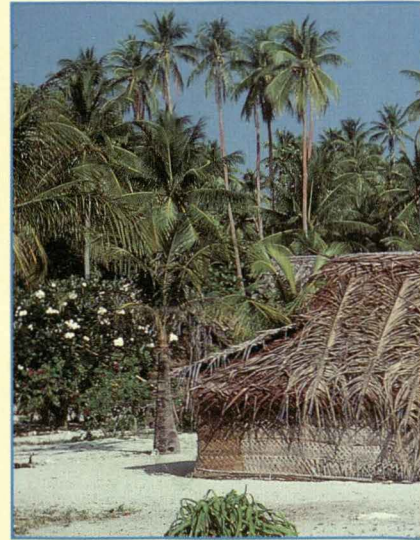
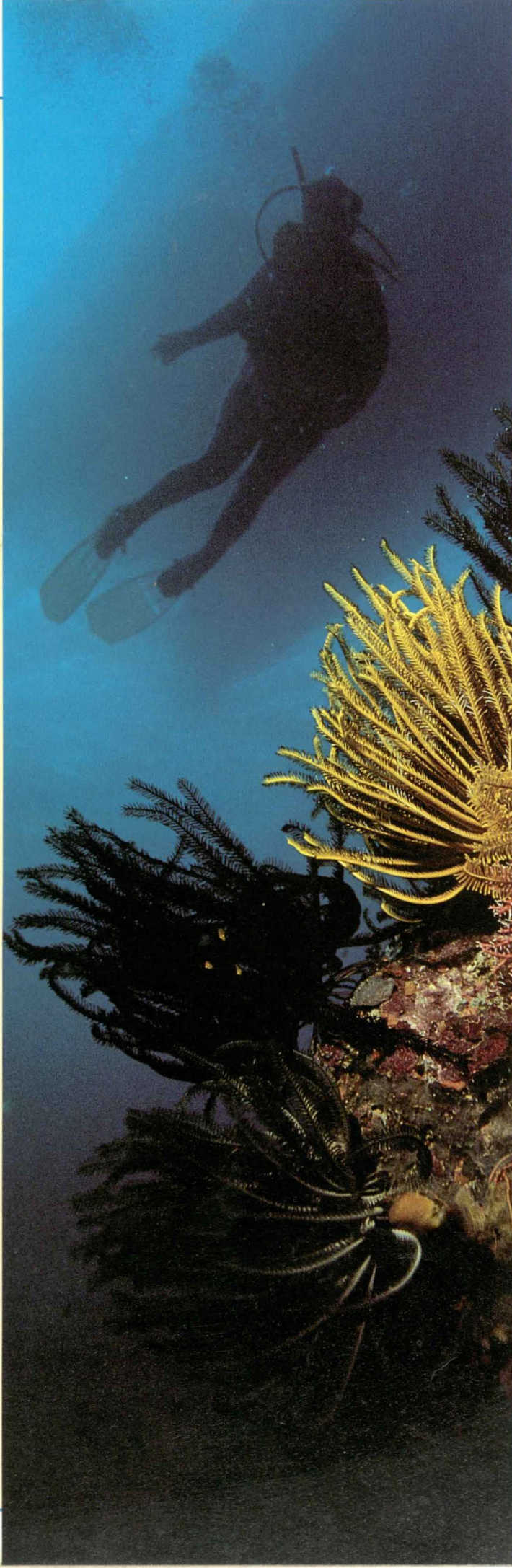
Taleo Tambu, a 15-metre catamaran, was our home for a week. Comforts were not left behind, just a hectic city life-style. Gentle lapping of the sea against the hull acted like a tranquilliser, making sleep each night come easy. A beam of eight metres ensured the stability of the vessel and a comfortable voyage even for land-lubbers.

A week on board a sailing vessel was something different for us; not the usual full-on dive vacation but a cruise on a luxury yacht. We could dive as often or as little as we wished, snorkel and swim, or explore some of the many islands in the Milne Bay Province.

We left Sydney in the early morning and by nightfall that same day were enjoying dinner at anchor in a quiet inlet two hours out of Alotau, Milne Bay Province.

Skeleton Island was to be a short stopover, just enough time for one scuba dive to photograph the lush coral and colorful fish on the shallow reef. Nuakata Island and East Cape were pencilled in on the itinerary along with Hummock Island. Hummock looked the most promising, offering an excellent overnight anchorage in a protected shallow lagoon. The outer edge of the fringing coral reef had a deep water dropoff that hopefully would provide a good scuba diving location. And that it did!

The fish life was prolific. We saw large bands of surgeon and parrot fish picking over the coral in shallow water. Coral trout lay undisturbed on sand patches between coral clumps as small goatfish rummaged around them. Occasionally a grey reef shark would cruise up out of deep water, check us over, and swim away uninterested. Small turtles inhabited the coral garden. They eyed us warily. A



school of bannerfish, all moving in formation in the same direction, cruised past with military precision.

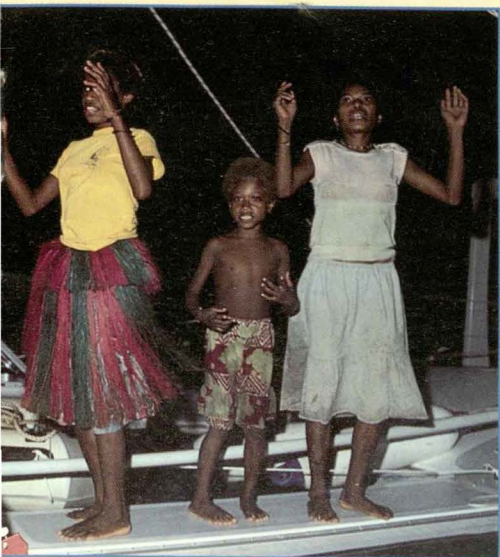
A school of batfish swam nose into the current, hovering and eyeing us as we moved in closer. Like most wild animals, fish feel threatened by humans and the batfish, intimidated by two goggle-eyed creatures in bright colors, fled down the reef.

A school of barracuda, a common sight in PNG waters, slowly circled overhead. Long and sleek and built for speed, they swam together in a tight group, only allowing us to approach to within 10 metres before they broke the circle formation and moved out into deeper water.

This unnamed reef at Hummock Island provided us







Far left Living coral in Taleo Tambu's shadow. clockwise, from below At anchor at Nuakata Island; impromptu singsing on board; kula trade items; skipper Alun Beck and Lyn Manly; typical Milne Bay village house.







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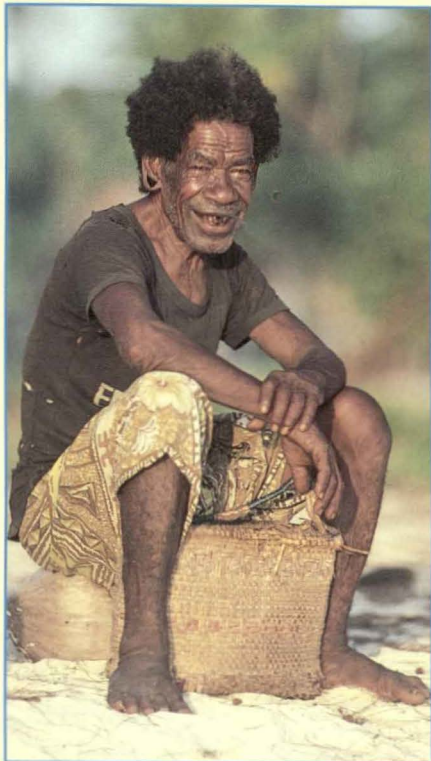


with a wonderful diving experience. Was it only three days ago that I was fighting traffic in the heart of Sydney? That was now just a dim memory.

The days flew by. When we weren't sailing, scuba diving or snorkelling we went ashore and visited picture-postcard villages; thatched huts nestled between coconut palms on white sandy beaches with frangipani trees lining the walkways between houses. Villagers showed us their most prized possessions, the items obtained in the kula trade circle. Necklaces and arm bands, made from shell and bone, are traded for each other in opposite directions within the trading ring that stretches throughout the Milne Bay Province. The items, laid out on woven pandanus mats for us to view, are not valuable in terms of wealth as we know it, but are a valuable status item to the local people. Much prestige is gained during exchange festivals by those men who are official traders. Not everyone is sanctioned in the circle. Trade pieces gain value with age and from stories attached to a particular



Top Milne Bay people are open and friendly. **above** Hermit crab foraging. **below left** Engineer Group islander. **below** Giant clam mantle in closeup. **right** Hummock Island.







place. The system is neverending for it is considered mean to withhold items from the circle. Participants in the trading ring develop lasting and far-reaching relationships that ensure a welcome wherever they travel.

The people of Hummock and Nuakata Islands made us extremely welcome. Their gifts overwhelmed us: bunches of flowers, handpicked and arranged in beautiful sprays, pearly nautilus shells and simple shell necklaces, all given in friendship. We gave gifts in return and invited several families on board for an evening meal and a singing.

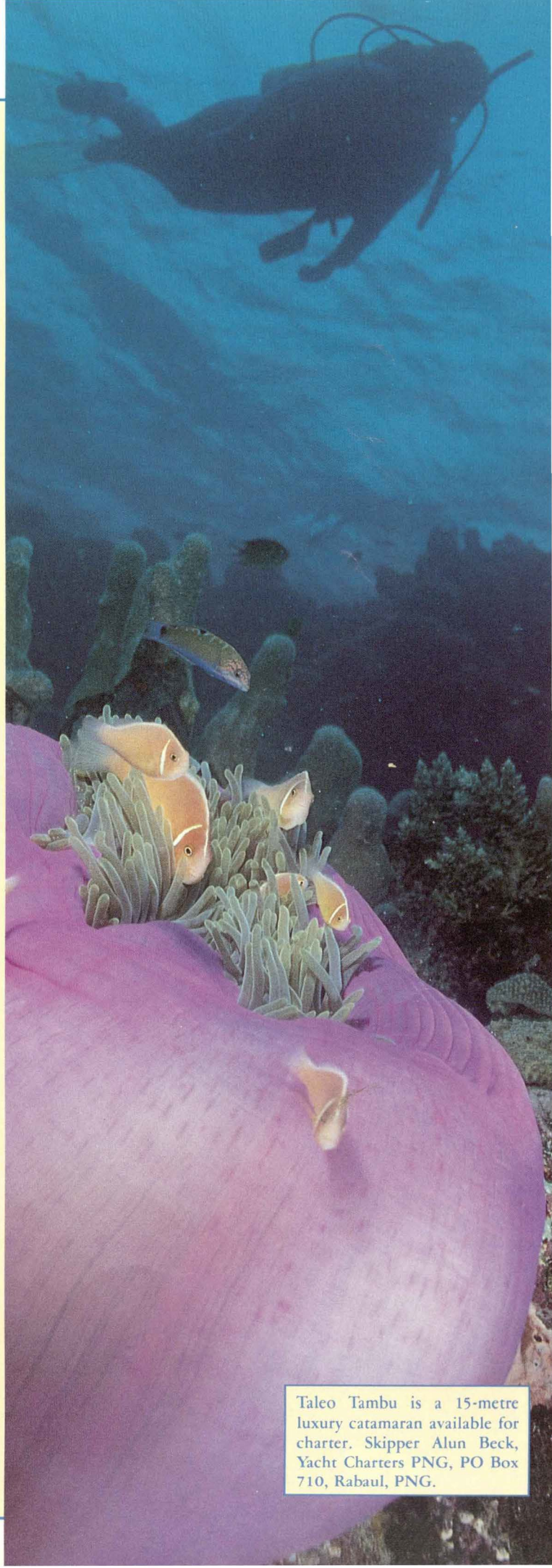
One daytime excursion in a village on East Cape led us to a little-known skull cave. A small

group from the village escorted us through a thick tangled mass of vines to a limestone outcrop about half a kilometre from the sea. The light from the torches illuminated the interior of the cave. Dozens of skulls lay scattered over the floor. No other bones, just skulls, were present. We inquired from our guides as to the origins of the cave. I was quite surprised that they did not know.

Later in the day we headed back to Alotau. In the past week we had sailed through a small section of the Milne Bay Province. In fact we hardly scratched the surface, there were so many more places to visit — next time!

**Top** Many mysterious skulls litter this East Cape cave.

**Below** Author Lyn Manly in crystal clear water. **right** Clown fish get protection from host anemone.



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# MAGICAL MANTAS

Story and photographs by Bob Halstead

The manta rays are putting on a show and I have a ringside seat. This is not a circus, it is more a ballet. The gymnastics dazzle and the lasting impression is of sublime grace, control and harmony.

Two approach each other, five metres below the surface. They are head-on and their wing flapping is synchronised. I am watching from below, tense with the expectation of a catastrophic collision. Is this a game of manta 'chicken'? Will one dominate and force the other aside? Just as I convince myself that collision is unavoidable, both sweep their wings down in unison, tilt their bodies sideways and surge in loops, bellies together at first, then rolling out each with one wing tip just slicing the surface. Still synchronised, they head away in opposite directions.

Earlier, I saw formation flying, with four mantas side by side, wings tipping the surface, mouths open, cephalic fins funnelling plankton into their mouths as they led. I stayed still as the formation passed. They returned, this time slightly staggered with the head of the trailing manta lined up with the tail of the one in front, and wings overlapping. As they went past, one broke formation and swam straight for me. I held my breath and did not move. A couple of metres in front of me the manta turned slightly and glided by just an arms length away. Later I swam over to the mantas as they were practising loops and wingovers in turn. It looked like a wonderful dance to unheard music, full of joy and exuberance, as though the creatures were exalting in their technical mastery of the deep.

I am still struggling with the fact that to most people, fish are either good to eat, bad to eat, or dangerous. How could they understand?

Manta rays are large fish with large brains. I have read that they have the largest brains of all the fishes. They are reported

to grow to a span of five metres and have a weight of nearly one tonne. I have certainly seen mantas approaching that size in PNG although most span three to four metres. They feed on plankton as do the great whale; they do not have a spine near their tails as do sting rays and they are completely harmless.

At least two species of manta live among the reefs of PNG: the giant manta, *Manta alfredi* and its smaller relative *Mobula diabolus*. Apart from size, the mantas can be distinguished by color and head shape. Giant mantas are black and white, the backs typically black with the odd white mark which can be used to distinguish individuals, and the bellies completely white. However I have seen individuals which were black on both sides and very impressive creatures they were.

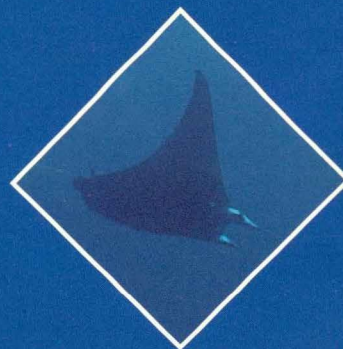
The smaller *Mobula* are uniformly grey-brown, have a mouth which is slightly underslung and more delicate cephalic fins. The cephalic fins are two lobes growing either side of the head which can be formed into a funnel to help in feeding. Being similar to the horns on the devil, they give the animal its common name of devil ray. Both rays will school but the smaller ray seems particularly gregarious; I have seen schools of up to 50 rays together and schools of 30 or so are quite common.

One Christmas near East Cape in Milne Bay Province we anchored on a reef and, looking over the glassy water, saw fins slicing through the surface.

The fins belonged to several manta rays and to confirm this, one jumped from the water, crashing back with a mighty splash. Some people claim that they jump to dislodge parasites or make a territorial display, as if every action has to have a rational cause. From my knowledge of mantas they probably do it because they can and because it is fun. Looking around, we could see that mantas surrounded us. A pair came right up to our bow and

we could see every detail clearly from the boat. We quickly donned our snorkelling gear and cameras and entered the water. My first reaction was one of disappointment as I realised that the water was not very clear. But looking more carefully I saw that the reduced visibility was caused by a thick soup of plankton. The water was full of minute larvae, each about one millimetre long, and this was what had attracted the rays. It was a feast for them.

A slight current was running and this gradually increased but the mantas seemed to love it, swimming into the current to feed then drifting down current, and circling around to feed into the current again. With a friend, Julie Balaban from New York, I drifted with the mantas at the end of their feeding run, then a kilometre or so from our charter boat the Telita, we were picked up in the outboard powered dinghy and taken back to the start again. We spent hours in the water playing with the mantas. There were at least 25, all large and all beautiful.

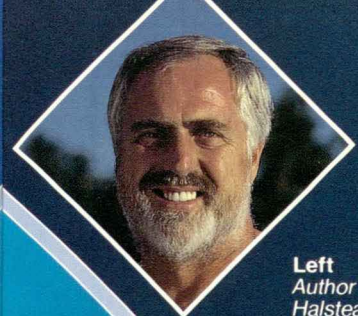


Above Manta rays are among the biggest, most graceful and harmless fish in the ocean.

There have been many other occasions when I have been able to swim with manta rays, all of them memorable.

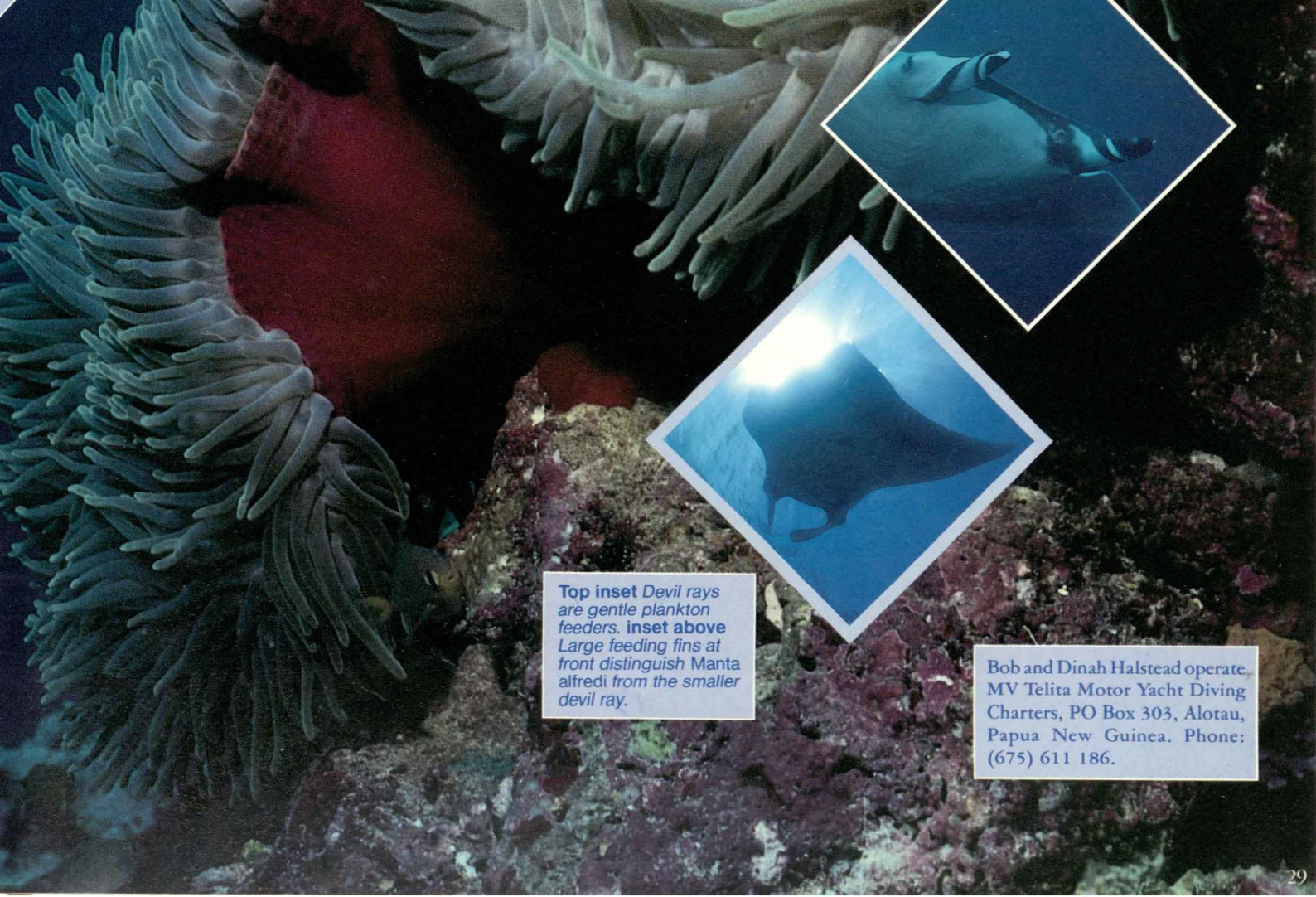
Manta rays are preyed upon by killer whales, something I discovered only recently. On two independent sightings — one by Jean Michael Cousteau when he was filming at Wuvulu Island in PNG and one by friends John and Mary Pohle — killer whales were seen eating manta rays. This explained a mystery that had been puzzling me for a while. A few years back, the mantas which were commonly seen near East Cape disappeared for a while. During the same period I remembered we had regular sightings of killer whales. So now I am not so excited about seeing killer whales. Impressive though these beasts may be, I prefer mantas. Sharks sometimes take nips from the mantas and I have seen several with crescent shaped bites on the trailing edges of their wings.





**Left**  
Author Bob  
Halstead.

In some parts of the world, fortunately though not usually in PNG, people sometimes catch and kill mantas for food. I feel the same way about that as I do about people killing dolphins, a deep-seated disgust and an angry sadness at the ignorance of some of our fellow humans. To the killer whale they might just be good eating but to me they are miraculous, magical, mystical and magnificent — the marvellous mantas.

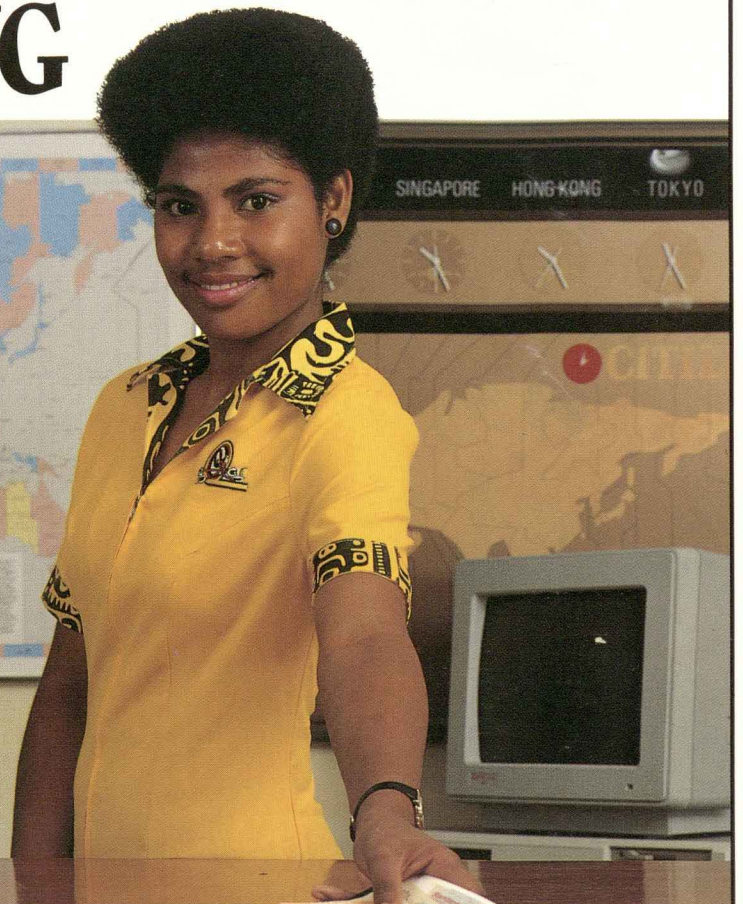


**Top inset** Devil rays are gentle plankton feeders. **inset above** Large feeding fins at front distinguish Manta alfredi from the smaller devil ray.

Bob and Dinah Halstead operate MV Telita Motor Yacht Diving Charters, PO Box 303, Alotau, Papua New Guinea. Phone: (675) 611 186.



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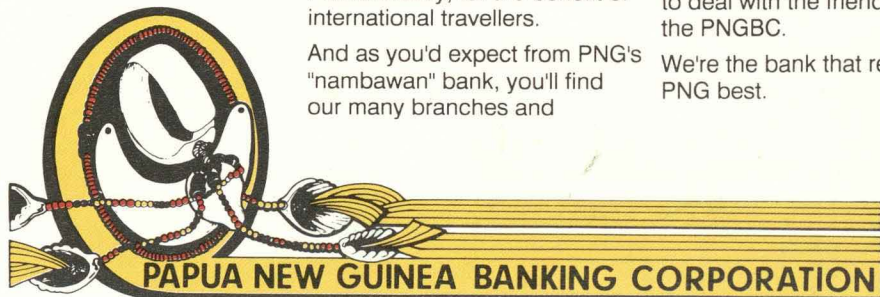
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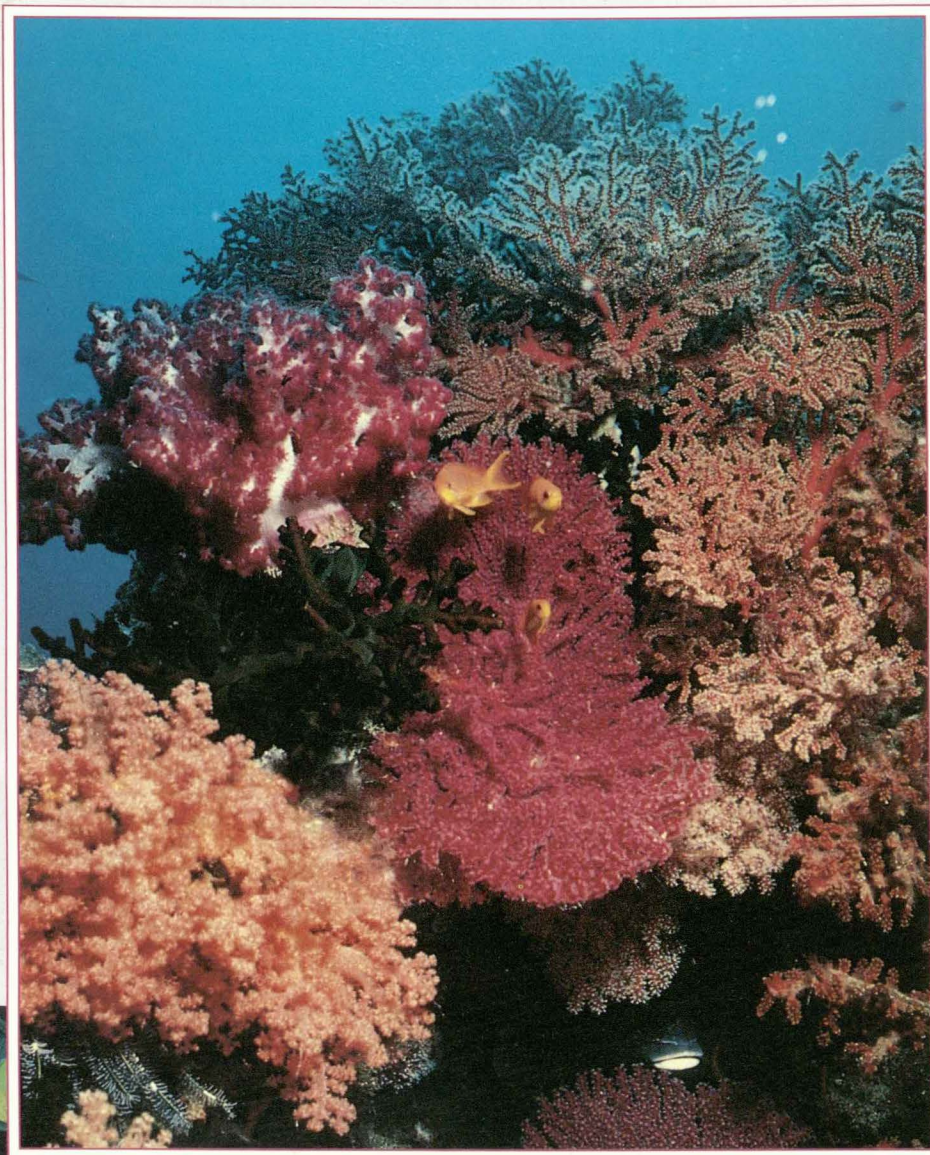


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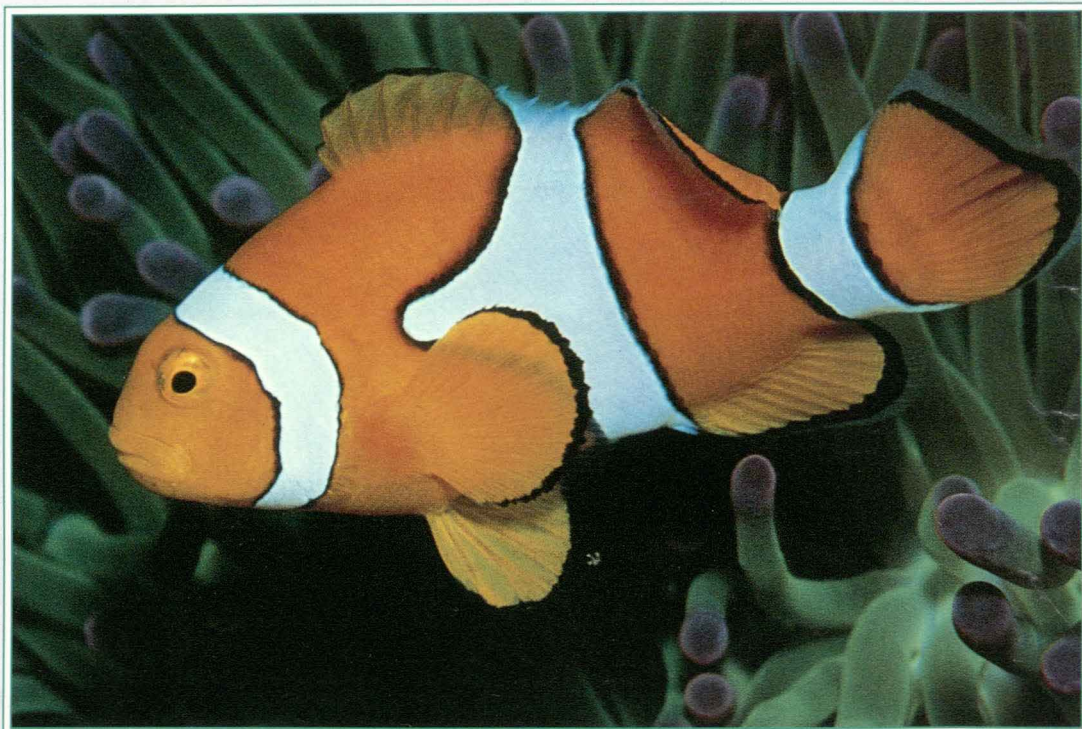
# Bootless Bay

Story and photographs  
by Paul Trotman



*Left* Brightly colored coral on Horseshoe Reef.





**Right** Anemone fish or clown fish is favorite of photographers.

**C**aptain John Moresby, investigating the south coast of the mysterious land of Papua New Guinea, sailed into the harbor of Port Moresby in 1873 and named it after his father, Lord Fairfax. The town which sprang up there was named after the captain. No doubt Moresby surveyed many harbors along this coast and it may well have been he who applied the seafaring term for useless anchorage — bootless — to a bay some 22 kilometres east of Fairfax Harbor. How wrong a description it is! This small bay, some 11 degrees south of the equator, offers some of the most exciting and varied diving anywhere.

Cloud cascades down the 1100 metre face of the Astrolabe Range, the fingers of the PNG

jungle reach towards the road and the sky is that delightful deep blue that only a tropical morning can provide. A dirt track to the right, barely above sea level, leads to the Tahira Boating Centre, the home of Tropical Diving Services and the jumping off point for Loloata Island Resort. James Ilaisa, the captain and divemaster of the MV Solatai, greets you with a confident and happy smile and within minutes has you settled and eager for that 8am start.

Spinner dolphins often join the Solatai to play in the boat's bow wave as it makes a 45-minute journey out to one of the 30 or so dive sites. A favorite location is aptly named Horseshoe Reef, which is part of the Papuan barrier reef system which in turn links through the Torres Strait into the Great

Barrier Reef of Australia.

Some two kilometres long, Horseshoe offers good dive sites. At the eastern end, sheltered from the swells of the Coral Sea, lies a sunken fishing trawler, the Paii, with her bow in about 30m of water and her deck at 20m. The Paii and adjacent reef are home to a kaleidoscope of marine life ranging from the most minute to the very grand. Yellow-tailed fusiliers swirl around the mast of the vessel, soft corals sway in a gentle current and giant clams invite a soft caress. That most colorful and best known of species, the anemonefish, dart in and out of their host's poisonous tentacles, protected by a special chemical in their external mucus.

If one is lucky, the Paii's resident grouper may appear and if so will doubtless live up





to its family's reputation of curious, bold and voracious! From time to time the Pai's other resident makes an appearance — Nessie, a silky smooth two metre long moray eel, which loves nothing better than a caress from her diver friends.

Often used for training divers, this part of the reef has its surprises for students and instructors. One recent group of novice divers had an unannounced guest during training — a two-metre grey nurse shark shooting through the class on its way to deeper water. Another group casually watched a three-metre hammerhead shark glide over them as they completed a safety stop in four metres of water.

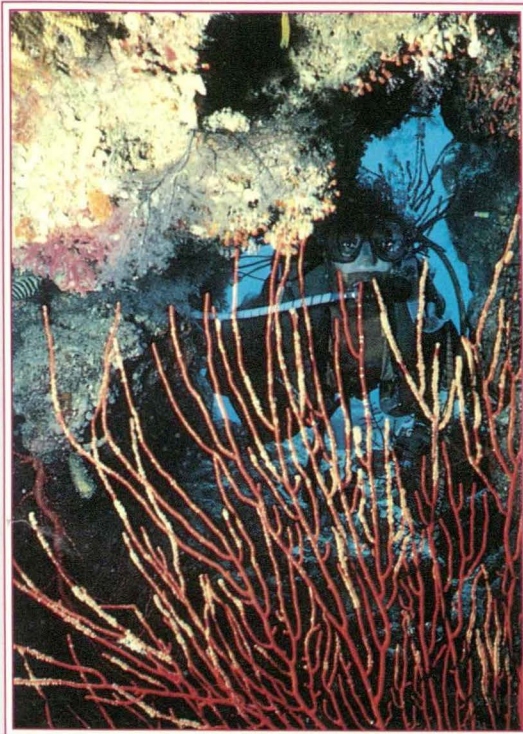
Encounters with the sea's larger inhabitants provide for active conversation on the short

journey to the next dive site. Not that such stimulation is needed among the cosmopolitan groups of people drawn to Bootless Bay. It is not unusual to find oneself in the midst of a discussion with marine biologists on the territorial habits of sharks or with leading underwater photographers on the problems of photographing marine creatures.

The real delight of Horseshoe Reef is at the western end where a 'bommie' rises from the deep sea bed. 'Bommie' comes from an Australian Aboriginal word, *bombora*, meaning submerged reef. On a rising or falling tide the position of this rock on the edge of a deep water channel is such that it attracts fish in thousands and provides an excellent habitat for hard and soft corals. The Solatai anchors

on a rocky and dead part of the main reef — good stonefish country. Once in, divers make their way along a shallow wall to an 18-metre saddle which leads over to the end bommie. Once on this magnificent sea mount it is difficult to know where to turn. Should it be to the swirling mass of jacks, trevally, tuna, sweetlips and colorful reef fish or perhaps inwards to admire the stunning array of corals?

No matter which choice is made the reef offers plenty of surprises. Often a resident family of baby white tip reef sharks prowls just above the reef. Juvenile grey reef sharks often dart into schooling fish to snatch a meal. Spanish mackerel and manta rays feed here on the reef which is one of Bootless Bay's better fish restaurants.



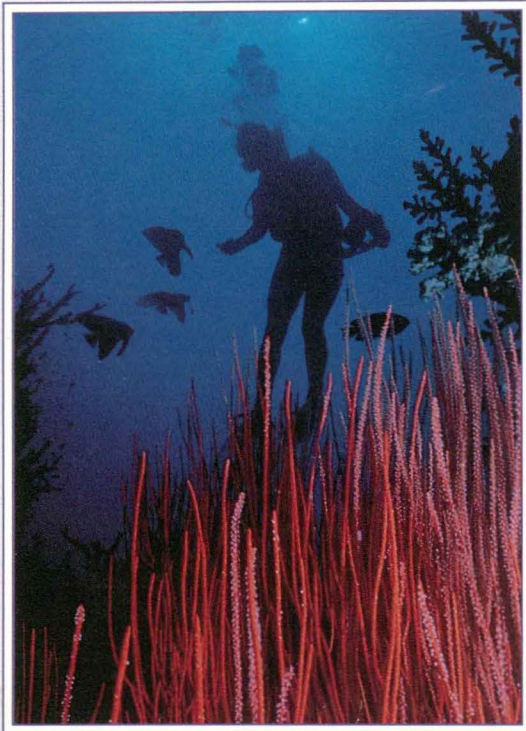
**Right** Divers enjoy safe, calm waters of Bootless Bay.



**Left** School of big-eye trevally shimmers in the light.







Right Fish are used to divers in Bootless Bay.



Left Diver with sailfin leaf fish.



Left Stonefish poisonous spikes are best avoided.

For those who decide to look into the reef, surprises of a different sort are to hand. Maybe some small white tips are resting under a plate coral, or perhaps a baby wobbegong shark. Closer inspection pays even greater dividends. The beautiful leaf scorpionfish nestles in the branches of a dendrophyllia coral, the white of the fish bright against the dark green of the coral.

With luck and care the rare Merlet's scorpionfish can be spotted waiting, camouflaged in the reef, for an unsuspecting meal to come within range. This fish, which has venomous spines, can fetch K1500 in the aquarium trade and has the unusual ability to shed its skin. The second specimen ever collected was found about 1980 on the end bommie.

Having enjoyed the variety and vitality of Horseshoe it is time to head home through clear blue waters, taking in the distant majesty of the 1100m cliff face rising to the capital's national park, Varirata. Ahead lolls a vast shape on the surface, a whale shark returned for another of its yearly visits. This gentle giant, rarely seen, is the largest fish alive and is a plankton feeder. It can easily attain a length of 12m and weigh more than 20 tonnes. Harmless to man and of no commercial importance, whale sharks will tolerate divers playing around them and catching hold of their fins to obtain a ride. But be sure to grab their dorsal fin and not the tail, as one quick flick of the tail can be dangerous. When the shark tires of company, it simply dives into the depths, often

sounding in the manner of a baleen whale rather than adopt the oblique path common to sharks in general.

Early afternoon and back at port, that 'useless' bay beckons tomorrow.

Paul Trotman is a diving instructor who has dived the waters of Port Moresby and Papua New Guinea for eight years. He ran Tropical Diving Services during 1990 and is now resident in Indonesia.





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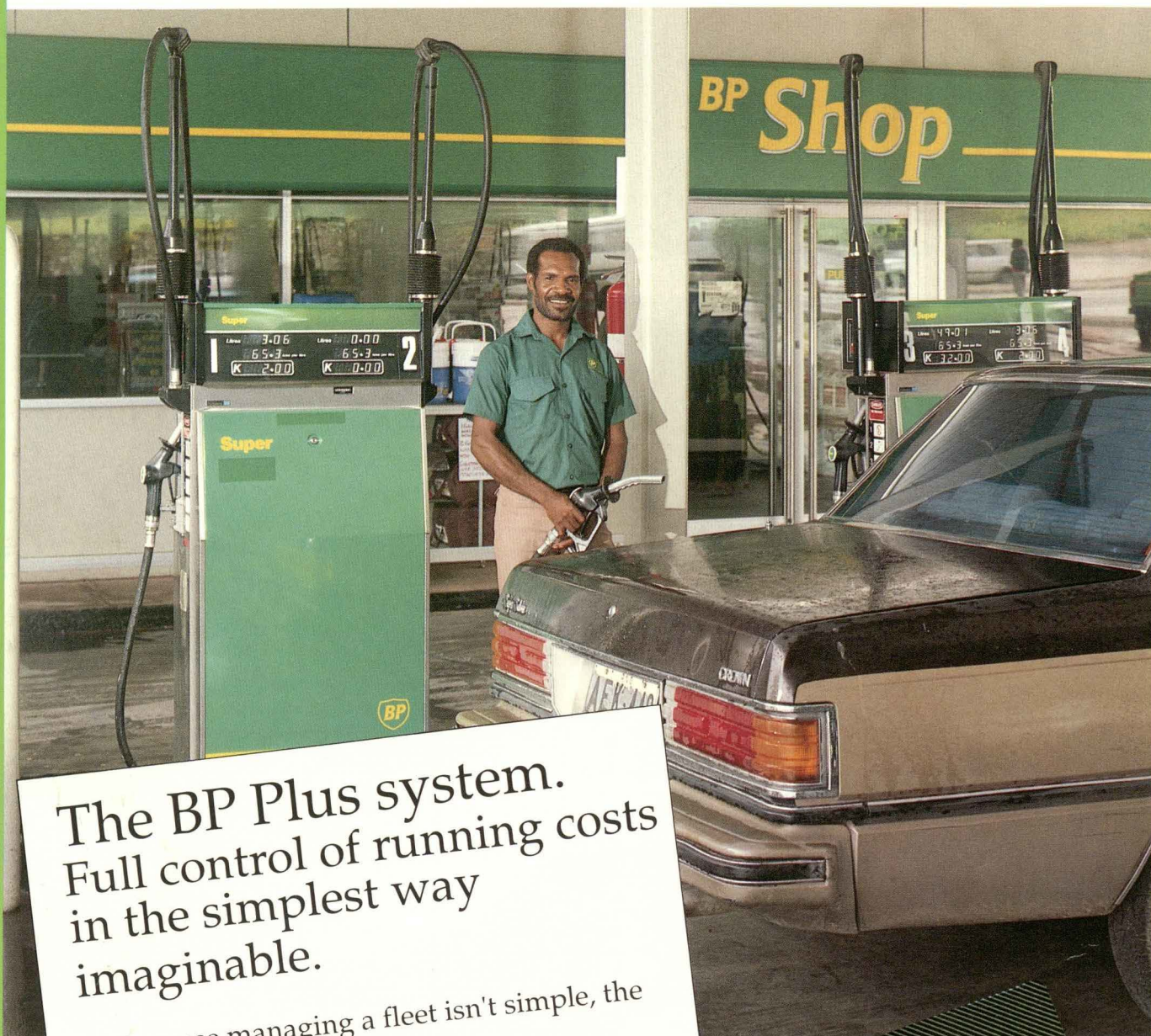
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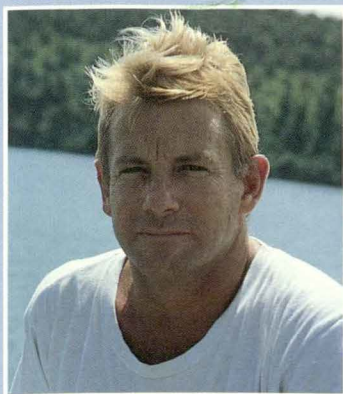
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# CREATING A

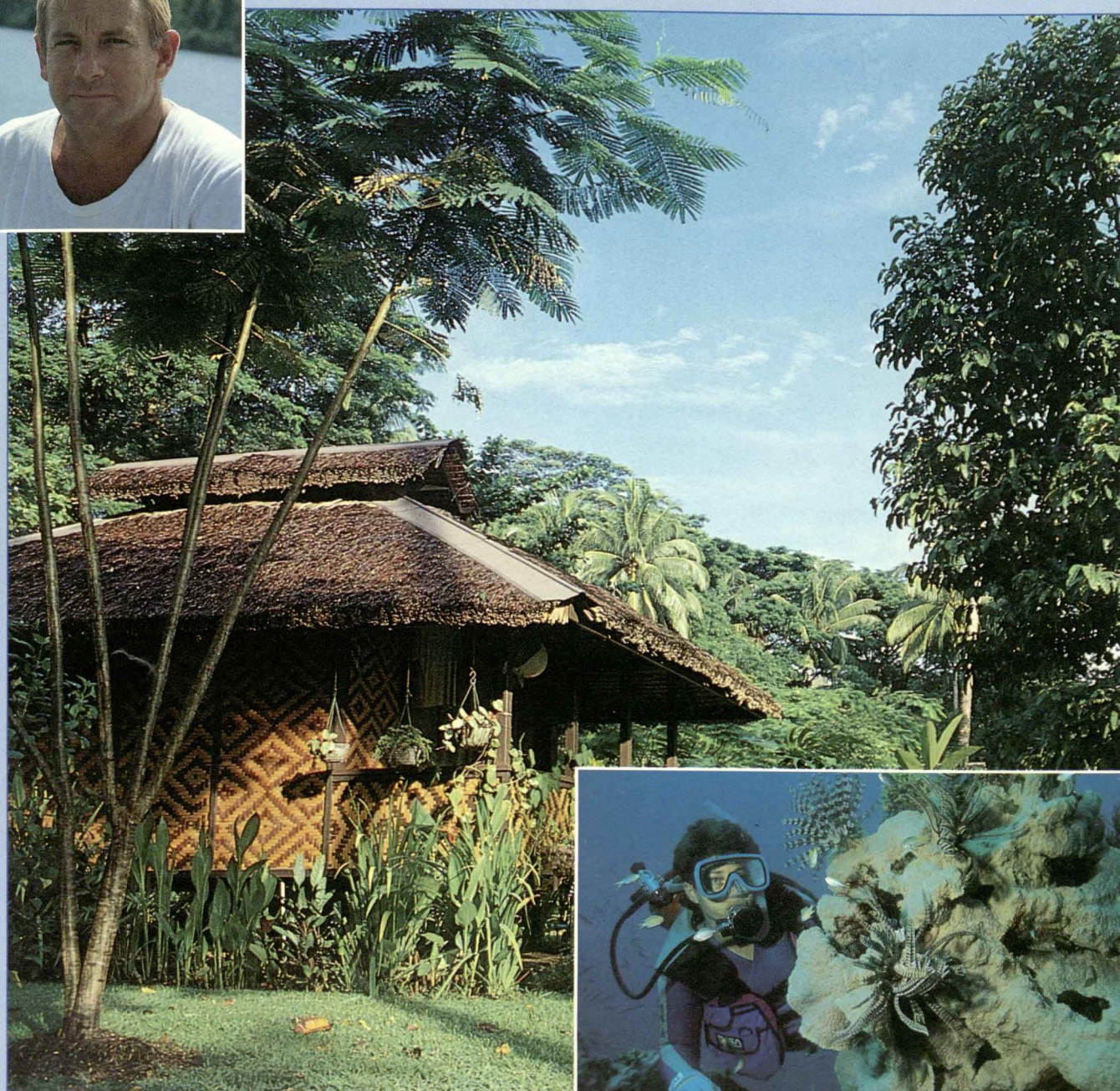
# WINNER

**Below** Max Benjamin developed palm oil plantation and dive resort.



Story and photographs by Lyn and Pat Manly

**Centre** Comfortable guest bungalow at Walindi. **bottom** Beautiful feather starfish.







**Top & bottom** Coral comes in many shapes and colors. **centre** Kimbe Bay angel fish.

**W**alindi Plantation Diving Resort, near Kimbe in the West New Britain Province of Papua New Guinea, is a favorite of divers from all over the world. In October 1989 Walindi was deservedly honored (with two other international resorts) when voted as offering the 'best reef diving from a resort' outside the Caribbean, by members of *In Depth*, an independent journal published in the United States.

Walindi started in 1969 when an Australian agriculturalist, Max Benjamin, bought a broken-down cocoa plantation. He first came to PNG in 1966, a Diploma in Agriculture filed in his briefcase. Working for the Department of Agriculture, Stock and Fisheries under the Australian administration meant a steady salary, most of which he saved towards enrolment fees at Aberdeen College in Scotland. The grand plan was to fulfil a long-time ambition to study cattle breeding and genetics.

This particular ambition was never realised. He did not anticipate the effect the Kimbe area of New Britain would have on him. His government work saw him engaged as an Agricultural Officer working on the Hoskins Oil Palm Project, the pioneer oil palm development in PNG. It was found that the region was endowed with a humid climate and an average annual rainfall of 380mm that could irrigate the rich volcanic, pumice-based soil. That, coupled with a lack of cyclones or strong winds, meant the region was ideal for oil palm cultivation.

By 1970 Max was truly settled in West New Britain. He had resigned his government position and was firmly involved in Walindi and the changeover in plantation crops from cocoa to oil palm. Scotland and Aberdeen College were getting further and further away. One dream was fading, others were taking its place.

Acquiring Walindi was the first to permanency in the Kimbe district, the second step was meeting an Australian







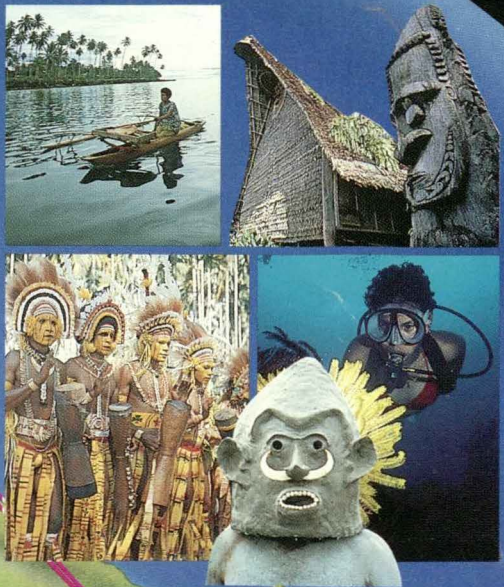
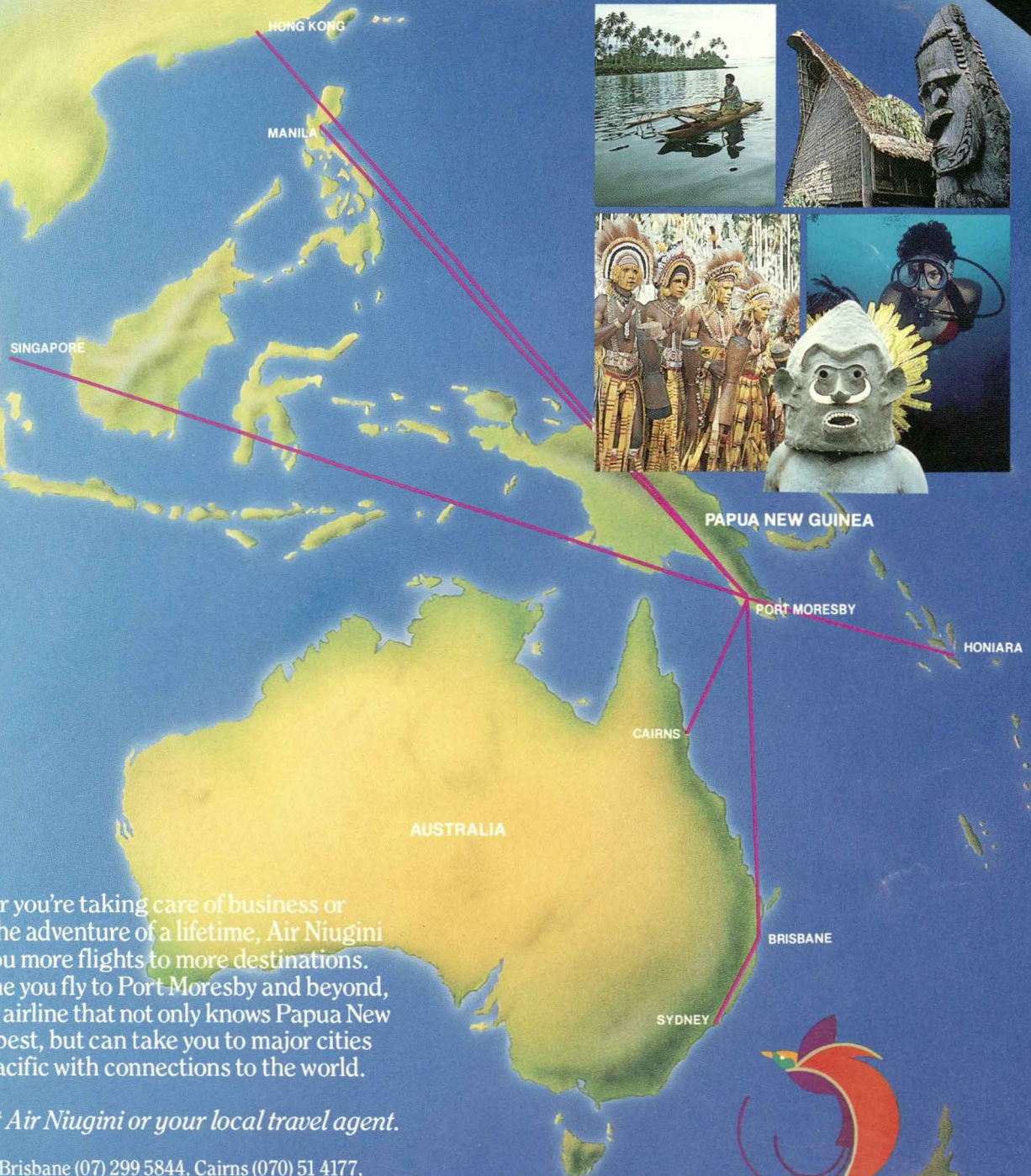
agriculturalist, Cecilie Kemp who became his wife and business partner, and mother of their two children. Palm oil from the Kimbe district finds its way around the world for use in margarine, as an ingredient in soap, or as a component of commercial cooking oil.

I asked Max Benjamin if his plans in the early days had included a resort. "No, I didn't give it any thought until late in 1978," he said. "We learned to dive in the mid-seventies and spent our weekends diving and exploring the reefs and pinnacles in Kimbe Bay. Cecilie and I took a vacation to the Red Sea and dived from Israel and discovered that we had better diving right on our doorstep in PNG. I became a dive instructor that same year and taught many of our friends to dive. We used Walindi as a meeting place on weekends. The dive service grew to include a couple of small aluminium runabouts, some scuba cylinders and a small compressor. The operation was very low key, in fact I could not stir up any interest from outside the country."

**Left** Author Lyn Manly in favorite environment. **top right** Cecilie Benjamin buys produce outside her kitchen door. **centre right** Walindi's swimming pool. **lower right** Kimbe Bay children enjoy meeting visitors.



# GREAT CONNECTIONS



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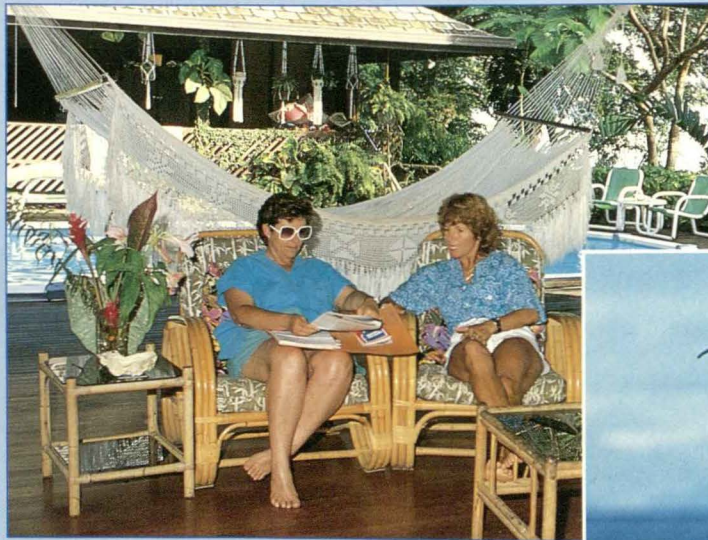
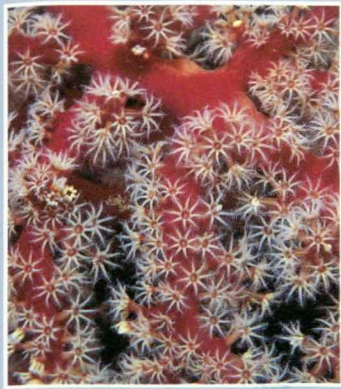
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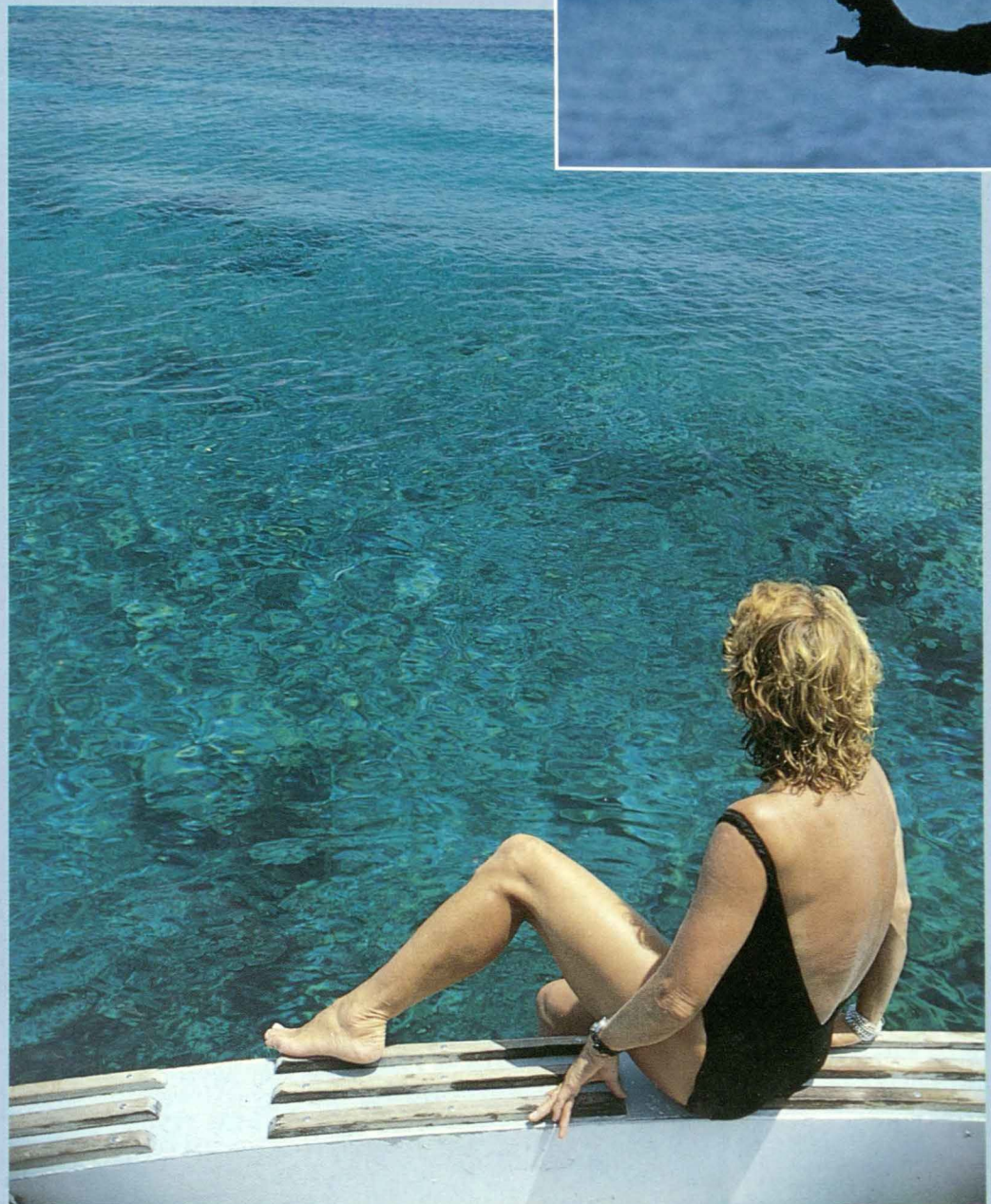


Far left Soft coral polyps. centre left Guest lounge at Walindi. below Serene Kimbe Bay. bottom Warm, clear waters entice swimmers.

The progression to a professional resort and dive facility began in 1984 when Walindi gained its first guest bungalows. About the same time, several wholesale travel agents from Sydney visited the area on a fact finding tour. The next year Walindi Plantation Diving Resort was in full swing and started to become known in the Australian marketplace and beyond.

On numerous trips to Walindi we have seen both the resort and the dive operation make steady progress. The resort now has six self-contained bungalows each with private bathroom, as well as four single rooms in the newly renovated original plantation house. All have wonderful views of Kimbe Bay. Sunrise is always something special and well worth catching as slivers of gold and orange light creep across the bay.

Every weekend Max Benjamin can be found out on the dive boat, enjoying his favorite pastime — diving! He shares the divemaster duties with the resident instructor and leads guests on dive tours over some of his favorite sites. "I really want visiting divers to have a good time at Walindi. I have swum with guests among killer whales in the bay. A similar experience occurred with a herd of humpback whales and we regularly spot pilot whales and dugong from the boat. I love swimming with sharks, especially the large school of hammerheads that are occasionally sighted at North Ema Reef. We can give guests the opportunity to see dolphins underwater. Ropes are slung from the dive

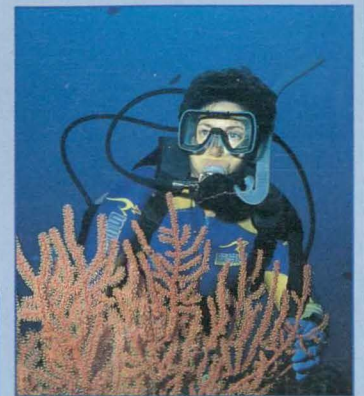






Above Kimbe Bay reefs are ideal for snorkelling. left On Rainbow Reef.

boat, with two or three snorkellers on each side and we motor at a very slow speed into the pod of dolphins. This has been happening now for about two years, just about every day, so the dolphins are becoming quite used to the boat. They swim just under the surface, only a few metres from the snorkellers and often dart across and back and then leap out of the water”.



Above Rewards for scuba divers are diverse and wonderful sights.



Above Feather starfish are unlikely looking animals.

Diving from Walindi is always full of surprises. Kimbe Bay is endowed with massive reef systems rising from a deep sea floor. These pinnacles taper off just a few metres under the surface and are laden with a superb array of sedentary growths; thick glades of crimson fire whips and trees of delicate soft corals intermingled among forests of multi-colored sea fans, black corals and sponges. A dive onto one of the Kimbe Bay reefs is like an excursion to an underwater botanical garden. Plants and flowers are replaced by masses of rainbow-hued corals and sponges, the birds and butterflies are represented by exquisite tropical fishes. Each

one appears as if handpainted with only the brightest colors from the artist's paintbox.

Max Benjamin is always taking us on tours of discovery; and leading divers onto new reefs, enabling them to have adventures and new experiences. "I get inspired when guests have a really good time at Walindi, it gives me a buzz," he says. "When they book a return holiday then I know that the hard work has all been worthwhile."

Air Niugini operates regular services to Hoskins near Kimbe Bay.

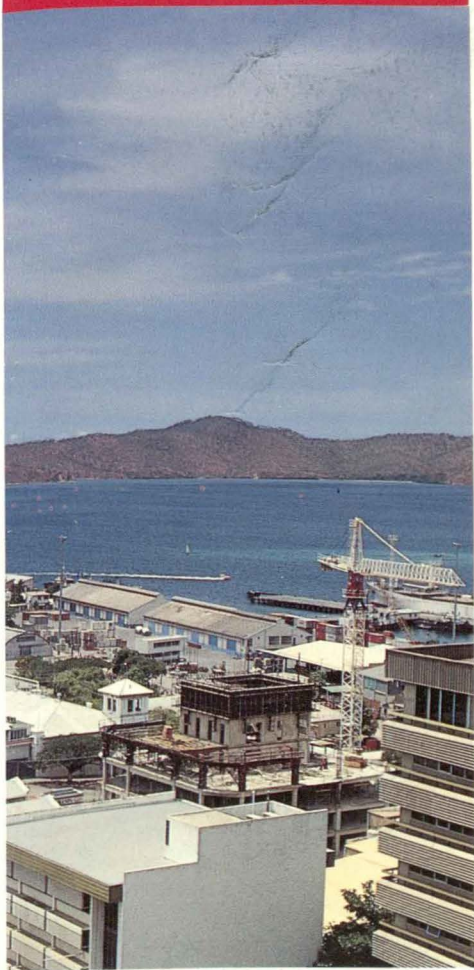
Reservations for Walindi Plantation Diving Resort can be made through South Pacific Tours, Port Moresby. Phone: 213 500; and Sea New Guinea, 100 Clarence Street, Sydney, NSW 2000. Phone: (02) 267 5563.





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