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gO! Exploring

WORLD CLASS DIVE SPOTS

By Patricia O'Connell

Stumped about where to take your next vacation? Too late for a European River Cruise, too early for the ski season! How about a vacation at a world-class dive spot? It is not necessary to be a world-class diver, just have a world-class spirit for adventure. The professional dive instructors will take care of the rest...and they do a great job!

Before you know it, you will be in the world of Jacques Yves Cousteau, diving deep into clear waters, exploring old shipwrecks, swimming through colorful caverns, cruising with the turtles and fish and experiencing the excitement of coral gardens and underwater walls.

Some years ago, when I was working with an International Dive Corporation, I would attend the annual PADI trade show, where the professional divers meet to check out new gear, swap tales and boast about recently discovered sites. There were always an amazing number of dive destinations represented. Now, that number seems to have doubled. You can choose from hun-

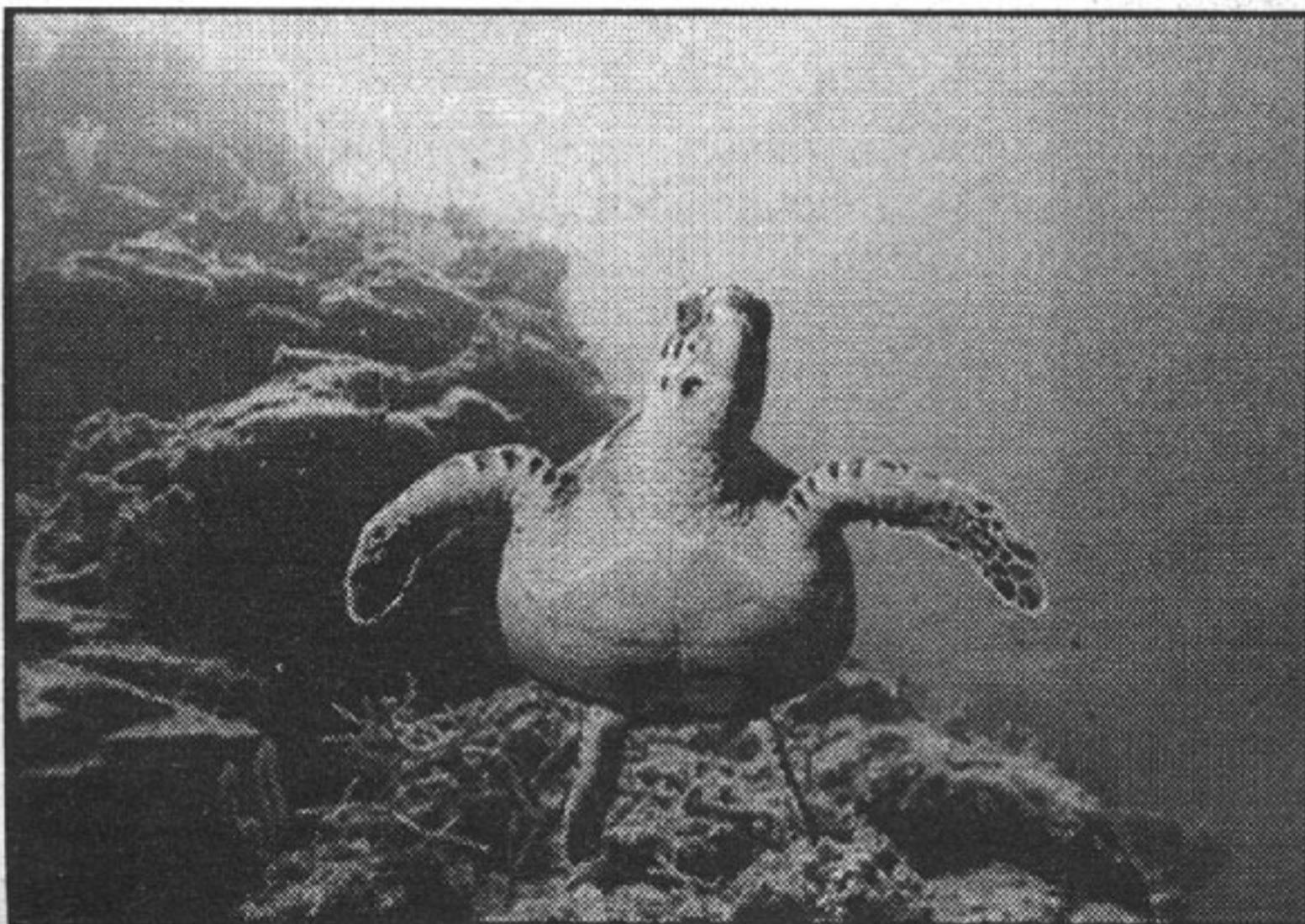


Diving in the Caribbean or even Canada can be a great choice for a fall vacation.

dreds of dive spots ranging from the Great Coral Barrier Reef in the Coral Sea to Lake Travis in Texas.

Diving is all about freedom, the freedom to explore the untouched; to glide freely along as the fish and sea creatures pass overhead; and of course, to find the best sites! Let's explore a few that will satisfy your quest for a great dive adventure.

Divers in the Caribbean can see all sorts of wildlife like this sea turtle.



THE CARIBBEAN

The hot spot right now is Honduras, where the Spanish vessels landed and celebrated the first Mass on the continent. A small Central American country rich in natural beauty is still a relatively undiscovered tourist destination. But, yes, divers have discovered Honduras!

Truly a "resort designed by Mother Nature," St. Anthony's Key Resort is one of the best bargains in the Caribbean for the dive enthusiast who also wants to relax and enjoy nature. Shipwrecks, Mayan sea caves and coral reefs are all in a day's dive in the Bay Islands of Roatan.

A certified, all-inclusive diving resort, St. Anthony's Key Resort is perched on the edge of the world's second longest barrier reef. Roughly 96 percent of all species found anywhere in the Caribbean can be seen on the Bay Islands' reefs.

Divers can observe a myriad of marine life, including reef sharks, bottlenose dolphins, parrotfish, seahorses and sea fans and are free to explore the many wrecks nearby, including a sunken plane covered with sea grass and coral sand. With water visibility ranging from 75 to 150 feet and 35 distinct dive sites 5 to 30 minutes away, the possibilities underwater are unlimited.

A five-star PADI Instructor Development Center, St. Anthony's Key Resort offers a full range of courses and certifications for all levels, including Open-water

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horseback riding on white-sand beaches, sea kayaking and canoeing, deep-sea fishing and exploring museums and the 2,000-year-old Mayan ruins of Copan.

The island of Roatan is located 35 miles off the north coast of Honduras. At 40 miles in length and less than four miles in width, Roatan is the largest of eight islands and rests upon an extensive fringing reef system. The warm climate, usually in the mid-80s, is kept comfortable by constant trade winds.

Diving packages start from \$599 and include seven nights' accommodation, three dives daily, meals, swimming with dolphins, horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking and Roatan Museum admission.

Roatan is easily accessible by plane from most North American cities. Honduras' newest airline, Sol Air offers direct flights from Dallas. They offer a new alternative to pleasure and business travelers, with hot meals and open bar, on-board service. Reservations can be made by calling (866) 3SOL-AIR, or online at www.solair.net. For more information on St. Anthony's Key Resort, visit www.anthonyskey.com or call 1-800-227-3483.

CANADA

This dive news item came as a great surprise! I was intrigued by the fact that off the

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Certification, Rescue Diver, Divemaster and Adventure Diver.

With no phones and no TVs, St. Anthony's Key Resort offers rustic elegance with cabanas on the beach and resident parrots in the trees. It is suited to the

eco-traveler and ideal for families, offering children and adults the opportunity to swim, feed and train dolphins on site at the Roatan Institute for Marine Sciences. For children, there is a Dolphin SCUBA Camp as well as SASY (Supplied Air Snorkeling for Youth) programs. Activities above water include



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West Coast of Vancouver Island, in the small town of Ucluelet, the ocean floor surrounding the town is littered with shipwrecks, thus labeling this area the Pacific Graveyard.

Ucluelet has world-class dive spots and unique marine life, which attracts scuba divers from around the world to seek out these northern waters for sights that could not be seen anywhere else. Home to some of the most unseen marine life, the waters off Ucluelet harbor a diverse eco-system that changes seasonally.

Diving off the west coast of Canada is not for novice divers as the ever-changing currents, sudden storms and jagged rocks can be dangerous even for experienced divers. However, for the experienced diver, the fast changing waters and elements on this wild Pacific coast are a call to adventure!

Winter is hands-down the best time of year to dive. Winter visibility in these waters is so clear it's easy to see why dive enthusiasts worldwide seek out this

remote location. In the summer months, plankton bloom blocks sunlight and underwater visibility is limited.

A 10-minute boat ride from Ucluelet's harbor lays the Broken Group Islands of Barkley Sound, a union of over 100 islands, islets and rocks. Here kelp forests offer a vast variety of rockfish, nudibranchs, crabs, starfish, bryozoans, sea urchins and sponges. At certain times of year the area is frequented by gray whales, humpback whales, harbor porpoise, eagles, black bears, seals and sea lions.

From diving in a sea of shipwrecks and inter-tidal life to storm watching on cliffs once used by lighthouse keepers, Ucluelet remains an undiscovered treasure. Once you arrive in Vancouver, BC Ferries offers you several routes to Vancouver Island. For information and reservations call 1-888-223-3779 or visit www.bcferrries.com.

Accommodations are excellent, and rates are reasonable. You can get a great room ranging from \$180 to \$290 per night (less in November) at the delightful Tauca Lea Resort and Spa on Harbour Drive. For information and reservations call 1-800-979-9303 or visit www.taucalearesort.com.

For more information on Ucluelet in British Columbia, contact: Jayme MacFayden at (250)721-2739.