

Live-aboard DREAMS

—by Rob Curran

It's only 8 p.m. But in my state-room, I struggle to keep my eyelids from slamming shut. The pen feels like a lead weight as I labor to finish my entries in my dog-eared dive log. Forget about it. Five dives today was more than this tired old body can handle.



A bed never looked more seductive. I shut out the light and slip between the cool sheets. A full moon shines through the window. It's heaven—a womb with a view. As the live-aboard gently rocks, I drop into peaceful sleep,



and dream. Vivid dreams.

I fly over endless gardens of lush corals and purple sea fans gently swaying in soft currents. I drift to the foot of a ledge. It towers 10 feet over my head. The soft corals are a riot of color, a painter's palette. Brilliant greens, blues, yellows, reds, oranges and whites compete to dazzle my senses. A school of silversides hovers near the top of the ledge. With each subtle change in current, the fish dart forward and back in unison, a symphony of synchrony.



At 7 a.m. I'm roused from my slumber by the exuberant whoops of my cabin mate: "Hey man, wake up! Shake a leg; we just spotted five dolphin off the bow!"

Sounds like a good omen. Reaching for my bathing suit, I'm warmed by the prospects of another day of live-aboard diving, diving better than my dreams.

Live-Aboard Advertising Section

Why live-aboards?

Today, divers confront a bewildering variety of options for dream vacations, live-aboards among them. Why choose a live-aboard diving cruise?

These days, the conversational currency of divers is names like Fiji, Palau, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Belize, and the Bay Islands. A live-aboard can carry divers to remote areas far beyond the reach of the day boats or land-based resorts. A live-aboard can take divers to reef outposts that restore meaning to the words virgin, untouched, unexplored and pristine.

Modern live-aboards are luxury resorts with a unique capability: to drop divers on five different reefs, wrecks and walls a day, every day. Want to develop your diving skills? Most modern live-aboards offer a wide range of advanced courses and specialties. Want to dive the edge of modern scuba technologies? Some offer nitrox and rebreather courses and programs.

Shoot 'til you're shot

Most live-aboard operators cater to the special interests of divers, particularly underwater photography and video. With a single camera and one day on a live-aboard, you can shoot a half-dozen rolls of film or five hours of videotape. These days, a diver is hard-pressed to find a modern boat that doesn't offer daily E-6 film processing and a video suite that could put a

small TV station to shame. Some live-aboards feature seminars and workshops conducted by world-famous imaging pros.

Sorting through the choices

With so many tantalizing options for live-aboard dive vacations, selecting one can be confusing—like navigating through a forest of kelp without a compass. Many divers find it helpful to narrow the field before sorting through the galaxy of choices. How? Ask yourself some questions, and focus on what's important to you.

Do you have special interests? For example, if you want to combine whale-watching with a live-aboard dive cruise, your options are limited to certain destinations, boats and times of year.

What's your budget? Factor in everything, including the cost of the cruise itself, airfares, side trips, meals not included in the package, and gratuities.

How much time do you have? Seven-day cruises are common, but live-aboard itineraries range from three days to two weeks. If you're flying half-way around the globe, it may be smart to budget a day or two on both ends of your trip to recover from some serious jet lag.

What's your diving ability? Some destinations—for example, the Galapagos—will challenge the skills of veterans. They're not recommended for new divers.




What kind of vessel do you prefer? Live-aboards come in all shapes, configurations and sizes: huge luxury yachts, tiny motor sailers, sailing cats, windjammers, and motorized catamarans. Don't book a week on a cramped ketch with no air-conditioning if you're claustrophobic or seasickness-challenged.

What kind of service and accommodations do you expect? Do you need to live in the lap of luxury? Or are you willing to forgo a few creature comforts for a unique vacation experience?

Do you need to bet on a sure thing? Divers sometimes forget the risk element of our sport. Fickle Mother Nature and acts of God often conspire to thwart the best laid plans of mice and men, not to mention divers and live-aboard operators. Are you willing to risk some disappointment if the dolphins and whales pictured in the glossy brochure don't show up due to some factor beyond the control of the captain?




After you've narrowed your field of dreams, you may want to navigate the internet for more detailed information. And when you're ready to book, just pick up the phone. One call is usually all it takes to make your dream vacation a reality.

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