Diving experiences shared

As scuba divers and scuba leaders, we have the opportunity to see so much more of our beautiful planet than most. Under the water, countless animal species and sea life can be found. Traveling to a dive location exposes one to various climates, cultures, and vistas not experienced when staying at home to watch television.

In this issue is a descriptive article on the wonders of the Galápagos Islands as shared by Gabrielle Gabrielli, SEI Instructor. Observing and interacting with the wildlife in their natural environments can be mesmerizing and memorable to say the least. Reminiscing on one’s favorite dives can continue to bring joy and happiness through the years. This desire to share our enjoyment and love of diving is often the simple motivation for many of our leadership team to reach out to new divers. Thadeus Bowden, our Executive Director had the opportunity to travel to the 2015 EUDI Show in Bologna, Italy and visit with numerous divers and scuba leaders from our agency. From his observations and interactions, he too found this to be the case. Italian divers tend to be affiliated with a diving club and the camaraderie between leaders and divers is the bond that keeps them enjoying the sport for many years.

Wherever one is located, wherever one travels to dive, there is always a diving family, there is always a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered.
April Events

April 14  National Dolphin Day

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/14/celebrate-national-dolphin-day_n_5146955.html

Bottlenose Dolphin - *Tursiops truncatus* A dolphin surfs the wake of a research boat on the Banana River - near the Kennedy Space Center. From: Wikipedia.org
May and June Events

May (3rd Fri)   U.S. National Endangered Species Day
May (3rd Sat)  U.S. National Learn to Swim Day
May 16         U.S. National Sea Monkey Day
May 22         U.S. National Maritime Day
June 1          Say Something Nice Day
June 5          World Environment Day
June 4          Swim A Lap Day

June 5

World Oceans Day

http://www.worldoceansday.org/

Coming in November

DEMA SHOW 2015

November 4-7

Orange County Convention Center
South Hall | Orlando, Florida, USA

In March, Thadeus Bowden, SEI & PDIC Executive Director, flew to Milan Italy and met up with Alessandro Talamona, SEI & PDIC Italia Course Director. Alessandro and his family were gracious hosts and provided a personalized tour of Milan with stops including the architecturally stunning Duomo di Milano (Milan Cathedral).
Thadeus travelled with Alessandro to Bologna, Italy to attend the EUDI 2015 show and visit with SEI & PDIC Italia leadership team members. During the show, the booth was constantly flowing with traffic and often packed with people. Divers and instructors alike stopped to visit and each afternoon, attendees were invited to sample ham, wine, cheese and chocolates – which were a delicious hit.
During the show, Davide Cecamore, SEI Italia CEO, and Alessandro Talamona, led a presentation and were able to award recognition to newly certified Instructors. Italy is a country with independent, close-knit and passionate scuba diving clubs where the camaraderie is the glue that binds divers together. SEI Instructors even travelled from Switzerland to attend. Friday night of the show, over twenty instructors joined together for a traditional Bologna meal which was a wonderful way to end the EUDI experience.
Thadeus toured parts of Italy with individual leadership members visiting famous Cathedrals and landmarks to diving locations. Highlights included partaking of Florentine steak in Florence and visiting Brunelleschi’s dome for the Duomo of Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore (The Florence Cathedral) with its exquisite

*Above: Thadeus partaking of Florentine steak in Florence, (photo taken by Alessandro Talamona)*

*Below: Brunelleschi’s dome for the Duomo of Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore (The Florence Cathedral).*
artistry and paintings to enjoying the pristine ocean views in Venice and touring the Basilica Cattedrale Patriarcale di San Marco (Saint Mark’s Basilica). A visit to Italy’s capital city Rome to see the Colosseum and the Vatican were also on the agenda. Italy lives up to its reputation of fine clothes and quality leather goods and is also a place where it was easy to indulge in handmade Italian gelato, pastries and café (coffee) wherever you went.
A trip that every experienced SCUBA diver should put on his or her bucket list is the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador. I’ve had the pleasure of SCUBA diving all over the world, and nothing compares to diving there for big sea life! However, there is always a risk when you return to a place that was a trip of a lifetime. This was my second trip to the Galápagos Islands; my first was in 2009.

I left Tallahassee, Florida on Christmas day 2014 to meet up with a group of fellow SCUBA divers in Quito, Ecuador. One thing I love about Ecuador is that there are so many wonderful things to see and do in addition to SCUBA diving. I arrived three days earlier than the liveaboard departure to join a group and do some land touring. We returned to Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, went hiking, and visited a butterfly farm and a chocolate factory in Mindo. A highlight was touring the Bomberos de Quito, an impressive fire and rescue operation center; the tour was thanks to my dive buddy Susan who is a fire rescue instructor. I also loved watching all the hummingbirds (even if we do have them in Florida) and enjoying the native flora and fauna. From there we travelled to Isla San Cristóbal, the easternmost island in the Galápagos archipelago, for a day before continued on page 13

Left: Couple with a baby sea lion.

(Photo credits: Gabrielle K. Gabrielli.)
Above: Group hiking at Nambilla Cascadas in Mindo, Ecuador.

Left 1: Butterfly at Mindo Butterfly Farm.

Left 2: Chocolate Factory ingredients, Mindo, Ecuador.

Left 3: Hummingbird in Ecuador.

Below: Shore panorama at Isla San Cristobal, Galápagos, Ecuador.
Galápagos Islands

“Galápagos Islands are an archipelago, or an island chain, of volcanic islands straddling the Equator off the coast of Ecuador. Much of the Galápagos Islands are a national park and biological marine reserve hosting a large variety of unique species. The main language on the islands is Spanish and the islands have a population of over 25,000.

“The Galápagos Islands also have a unique set of environmental conditions that set them apart from all other island groups in the world. Their sunny equatorial position on the globe combined with their location amid the cool Humboldt and Cromwell ocean currents allows these special islands to display a strange mix of both tropical and temperate environments, which is reflected in the complex and unusual plants and animals that inhabit them.

“When considering the diversity of species that do inhabit the Galápagos Islands, it is important to note how ‘unbalanced,’ in comparison to continental species diversity, the variety of Galápagos species are. For instance, there are many native reptile species, but no amphibians; there is an abundance of land and sea bird species, but very few mammals. When considering plants, those with large flowers and big seeds are absent while grasses and ferns abound.

“There are two main ways for species to make their way to remote islands (aside from any methods involving humans). The first method is by air in the form of flying or being blown by wind, and the second method is by sea while swimming or floating, sometimes with the aid of rafts of tangled vegetation.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gal%C3%A1pagos_Islands

http://www.galapagos.org/about_galapagos/species-arrival-and-evolution/
boarding. We visited a tortoise breeding station and walked around the peaceful, beautiful town to see resident sea lions lounging on park benches. The Galápagos Islands, located approximately 620 miles (998km) from the mainland, are primarily lava formations and include cactus forests and lush highlands. Ecuador only licenses a handful of vessels for dive charters, and at the time of my excursion, two had recently lost their licenses bringing the total to just three.

Because my last experience was so positive, I again booked my liveaboard diving with Explorer Ventures (EV), and I joined a group called SingleDivers.com that helps pair buddyless divers with divers of similar abilities. I first met my dive buddy Susan on a Maldives trip two years ago where we were the only two who never missed a dive. We are both addicted to diving and have excellent air consumption, so we make great dive buddies. Galápagos National Park Service veteran Macaron briefed our group and said that from his experience, nobody would make every single dive; Susan and I laughed because we knew he would be wrong. Our second guide on the journey was Liandro, also a park service employee, who is a fantastic guide. We had 16 divers on board; half went with one guide and half with the other on our two pangas, and the guides traded groups daily so we experienced diving with each.

Pangas

“The Panga is a type of modest-sized, open, outboard-powered, fishing boat common throughout much of the developing world, including Central America, the Caribbean, parts of Africa, the Middle East, and much of Asia.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panga_%28boat%29
It was my first time on the Humboldt Explorer, a 111.5’ (34m) vessel. The crew was exceptional, and I appreciated the positive changes EV had made from my last trip including with regard to food. This time, there were plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, and protein alternatives for vegetarians. Our check dive was also significantly better. Instead of a murky canal, we enjoyed SCUBA diving with many playful sea lions in San Cristóbal. Water temperatures were much warmer with ranges from 72-79°F (22-26°C).

Day two took us to Punta Carrion, Santa Cruz, where we had two nice dives with white tipped reef sharks, turtles, nudibranchs, and mobula. Visibility was 30-40’ (9-12m) at best, but the afternoon land tour on North Seymour Island was wonderful. We saw many sea lions as well as blue-footed boobies, frigates, and marine iguana. A special site was watching male and female blue-footed boobies in a mating dance.

**Nudibranchs**

“Nudibranchs crawl through life as slick and naked as a newborn. Snail kin whose ancestors shrugged off the shell millions of years ago, they are just skin, muscle, and organs sliding on trails of slime across ocean floors and coral heads the world over.

“Nudibranch means ‘naked gill,’ a feature that separates them from other sea slugs”

http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/06/nudibranchs/holland-text/1

- **Type:** Invertebrate
- **Diet:** Carnivore
- **Average life span in the wild:** Up to 1 year
  - **Size:** 0.25 to 12 in (6 mm to 31 cm)
  - **Weight:** Up to 3.3 lbs (1.5 kg)

“Nudibranchs derive their coloring from the food they eat, which helps in camouflage, and some even retain the foul-tasting poisons of their prey and secrete them as a defense against predators.”

http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/nudibranch/
Mobulas

“Both mantas and mobulas have the distinctive cephalic fins in front, but there are ways to tell them apart. One key distinguishing feature is the location of the mouth. Manta rays have a ‘terminal’ mouth, located at the very front of the head, between the cephalic fins. On the other hand, mobulas have a ‘sub-terminal’ mouth, located on the underside of the head, in a neck-like region. In addition, mobulas are smaller than manta rays and their cephalic fins are much closer together.”

http://flowergarden.noaa.gov/science/mantacatalog.html


Oceana Fact Sheet: Devil Rays

“Mobula rays live in the open ocean, swimming continuously through the water column instead of resting on the sea floor like other rays.

“Rays are filter feeders that primarily eat microscopic plankton and krill, with the occasional small fish. As devil rays swim, they take in water with the help of their cephalic fins. The water passes through the comb-like gill rakers (tiny projections on the gills), which filter out food while the water exits through the gills.”

http://oceana.org/search/google/mobula?query=mobula&cx=012855406829693131936%3Afkcdym8i5-s&cof=FORID%3A11&sitesearch
After an 18-hour boat ride, day three was spent enjoying four dives at Isla Wolf with excellent (100’ / 30m) visibility. We didn’t see much sea life on our first dive at Shark Bay, but our second dive at Landslide was great with several hammerheads and Galápagos sharks. At times we fought ripping currents to get to all the action, but it was worth it. On dives three and four of the day, we saw hundreds of hammerhead sharks as well as spotted eagle rays! We brought in the new year anchored near Isla Wolf (with so much diving, just a few of us stayed awake as the clock turned to midnight) then had a morning dive with hundreds of bottlenose dolphins on New Year’s Day before heading to my favorite Isla Darwin. Both Darwin and Wolf are uninhabited, protected islands; the only visitors are SCUBA divers.

The next two days were spent enjoying eight dives near Darwin Arch. I had told everyone that we were going to see a whale shark on our first dive at Isla Darwin, but not many people shared my optimism since the water temperature was too warm at 79°F (26°C). Visibility had also dropped to 40-50’ (12-
15m) and currents were much stronger. Liandro’s group was first to see the whale shark, and both groups were elated to spend time with the gentle giant that was about 35’ (11m) long! We had two more sightings of whale sharks. I fell in love with whale sharks, which are filter feeders, on my first trip to the Galápagos. The first dive I ever saw a whale shark was dive #800, and the first whale shark we saw on this trip was dive #1900. Currents were very strong and we saw many spotted eagle rays, turtles, hammerhead sharks, and Galápagos sharks. Diving was as phenomenal as my last trip, and we also were able to experience a rare night dive with lots of cool sea life including eel, rays, turtles, and puffers!

Above: Whale shark at Isla Darwin.

Above: Susan photographing a turtle at Punta Carrion, Santa Cruz.

Right center: Spotted eagle ray at Isla Wolf.

Right bottom: Divers aboard Humboldt Explorer anchored near Isla Wolf celebrating New Year’s.
After a 24-hour boat ride that was rough at times, we arrived at Cousin’s Rock for our final day of diving, day seven. There was a lot of spectacular macro life on our first dive including nudibranchs. We also saw our first octopus of the trip. The final dive was a wonderful way to end an incredible week of diving. We interacted with playful sea lions in the beginning of the dive, seeing lots of sharks, rays, and turtles, then having powerful interactions with a pod of curious dolphins at the end of the dive! Dive two was again spent with hundreds of spotted eagle rays at Landslide. Dive three was extraordinary at Secret Cave. We saw turtles, eel, a white tipped reef shark, and much more as we made our way through lava tubes and interesting formations. Sea lions came to play with us in the cave, and it was incredibly beautiful and fun!

On the last day with the big group, we disembarked in Puerto Ayora, Isla Santa Cruz, where everyone had phone and Internet service for the first time all week. We went to Reserva El Chato, one of my favorite refuges for tortoises. The downside

Top: Diving in lava tubes at Secret Cave, Isla Wolf.

Center: Turtle and fish.

Left: Trio of manta rays.
of group travel is that you must leave a wonderful location before you are ready; I almost missed the bus as I was having such a great time observing a 100-year-old tortoise! When approaching a tortoise, do so very slowly and respectfully; maintain your distance and don’t make noise. I saw others who would approach tortoises, and the tortoises retracted their heads. When I approached slowly then patiently observed, they became very comfortable with me and often actually walked closer to me knowing that I was not a threat. It was a magical experience that I highly recommend.

The rest of the group returned to the Humboldt Explorer for their return to San Cristóbal, but my dive buddy and I stayed on Isla Santa Cruz a few extra days. The plan was to SCUBA dive there as well, but a storm caused conditions to decline, and we were sufficiently satiated with phenomenal diving. Thanks to Jennifer with EV, we stayed in the quaint Hotel Pelican Bay within walking distance of the town and other attractions. We visited the Charles Darwin Research Station and watched local fishermen entertain crowds by feeding their scraps to pelicans and sea lions. A highlight was hiking to Galápagos Beach at Tortuga Bay where we saw many marine iguanas as well as baby hammerhead sharks swimming near the shoreline. The island as a whole is much more touristy than I prefer, but getting away from the crowds and dining at kiosks instead of restaurants on the main street provided a more authentic experience.

It was a long journey by taxi, ferry, bus, and plane to Baltra and then back to the mainland where we did some additional sightseeing in Quito on the final day of vacation. In summary, the glorious Galápagos Islands, Ecuador provides a phenomenal experience both on land and in the sea. You must be an experienced SCUBA diver since the currents can be very strong. Diving is unique not just because of the sea life but also because you often have to fight strong currents to get to the action, then you hug a rock or use a reef hook to stay in place while you watch the amazing sea life swim by you. I have visited 75 countries, many to dive, and Galápagos is one of the rare places I wouldn’t hesitate to return to again and again. Sometimes the trip of a lifetime is worth repeating!

Check out video of the trip at https://youtube.com/user/GabrielleConsulting (search the playlist for “Galápagos”) or see additional images at http://scubawithgabrielle.com.
Publications and Continuing Education

As a reminder, *Currents* is your publication. Submission to *Currents* counts toward continuing education credit, so we encourage participation in this journal. Articles or information may be sent to info@seidiving.org. We prefer Word documents for articles so text can be formatted to fit the layout. Photographs, figures and illustrations should be referred to in the text and attached separately with proper labeling. Photos should be sent as JPG or PDF files at least 300 dpi. If you have any questions, please contact our office at 765.281.0600. Please scan all files and pictures for viruses before sending.

SEI & PDIC are not responsible for the views expressed in the content of the articles published. These articles are written by independent leadership members sharing their personal experiences and insights they have gained over years of teaching and scuba diving.

Contact Us

Contact the *Currents* editors at info@seidiving.org

General questions, scuba certifications, replacement cards, and leadership renewals contact:

SEI office  
1623 W. Jackson St.  
Muncie, IN 47303, USA  
765.281.0600  
info@seidiving.org  
www.seidiving.org

PDIC Intl. office  
1623 W. Jackson St.  
Muncie, IN 47303, USA  
765.281.0133  
info@pdic-intl.com  
www.pdic-intl.com

*Currents* is an official publication of Scuba Educators International Inc., and PDIC International.  
Editors: Thadeus Bowden and Santyna Johnstone.  
Layout design: Eva Lantz