



# Diving Medicine Online

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## Apres Diving in Palau

It's almost certain that every serious scuba diver has either been to or heard about the really great diving on Palau, but probably few know about other above-surface attributes of this beautiful and somewhat mysterious place.

Recently back from my third trip out to these small islands clustered in Micronesia, north of New Guinea, I got to reminiscing about the usual great dives at Blue Corner, Siaes Corner and Ulong Channel. These dives are World Class, presenting to the advanced diver severe challenges and offering the intrepid photographer myriad opportunities for great photos. CEDAM has named Palau one of the seven underwater wonders of the world.

Becoming somewhat jaded after six dives on Blue Corner (three on this trip), I started thinking about outstanding episodes to tell my friends and relatives back home. Each time I started a story I would come to visits to Ulong Island and to "Two Dog Island", one of the small Rock Islands that have the appearance of green mushrooms.

These visits would come during lunch breaks between our morning deep dives and afternoon shallow dives, the first after diving Siaes Corner, the second after Blue Corner. Both of these islands are uninhabited, but as implied by the name, Two Dog Island has two dogs of indeterminate breed that live on the island and

greet all boaters boisterously with mock ferocity, then return to their usual activity of stalking fish in the shallow water. How and when these dogs got on the island, no one seems to know, but they seem to be from the same litter. They have the exact same physical characteristics, brown medium-sized male dogs with curled up tails-as in a chow---but easily differentiated due to a burn scar on the side of the dominant dog. This dominance is quite evident with the Alpha dog physically attacking the other several times while we were there.

The dogs greeted us all as long-lost friends, selectively ate some fried chicken but turned up their noses at rice and other Japanese edibles. They then went back to their usual activity of fishing for crustaceans and small fish in the shallow water between islands. They appeared well-fed but from what I saw regarding their fishing ability it was not from eating fish. One of the lady divers sniffed knowingly, "What do they do for female companionship?" Another male diver said "How do you know they're not gay?" That ended that conversation quickly! Ulong Island is a larger island west of Koror (the capital of Palau), and is somewhat isolated from the other islands. It juts out closer to the surrounding reef and has a beautiful creamy white coral beach with large natural limestone overhangs close to the beach. Now uninhabited it has several very interesting places to see.

On the Southwest side is a historical marker commemorating the shipwreck of the Antelope, a British East India Company trader that wrecked on the nearby reef in the late 1700's. Finding Captain Henry Wilson's crew with powerful guns, a native war party sent to greet them became friendly, the ship was salvaged and using his crew and native labor, Wilson was able to build another seagoing vessel and sailed it back to England.

Mysterious glyphics and wall paintings are clearly visible on a limestone overhang which can be scaled only by a swinging rope ladder. The nature of this art is apocryphal but is said to predate the present era. Curious figures and designs resembling bodies, shields and the sun can also be found in caves on the northeast side of the island.

Poisonous sea snakes use these caves near the water to hide and get a little sleep during low tide. I was somewhat surprised to find a 5 foot black and white banded

sea snake coiled up sleeping in the back of a low tidal cave-I didn't disturb him and he didn't bother to wake up.

Other exciting between dive activities include a visit to the island of Peleliu. Here occurred one of the bloodiest battles of WWII, with the Japanese stubbornly defending the tiny island to the death. A dead fleet of American landing craft watches from shore as you dive the Yellow Wall, one of the most beautiful but unheralded dives I've ever seen-prettier even than the Great White Wall in Fiji-and a heckuva lot easier. Around the corner is the infamous Peleliu Tip, not being dived now because of the dangerous currents.

Just about all of these sites include good to excellent snorkeling and if you can't seem to get enough salt water and tropical fish with your scuba dives - you can snap on a weight belt and do some free diving along with your surface interval. Exceptions to this are dives such as Blue Corner, New Dropoff, Peliliu Tip, Anguar, Ngerumekaol/Ulong Channel and Chandelier Cave.

Other excellent snorkels are Wonder Channel, Jellyfish Lake, Soft Coral Arch (although I heard that it had been pretty much damaged by an influx of destructive Taiwanese divers), and Coral Gardens (Southeast of Koror).

Meanwhile, back at the hotel, if you choose to take a day off from diving, one of the latest fun activities is to kayak around the Rock Islands and explore the many caves. Snorkeling is just a few feet away in shallow crystal clear water with opportunities to see most of the same fish and "critters" that are seen scuba diving. Maybe you'll chance upon one of the saltwater crocodiles that still inhabit the islands-although in much fewer numbers since the "purge" after a Palauan was killed and eaten in the 1960's. If you must see one, there's a farm with about 40 crocodiles near the KB bridge-on the Koror side run by one of the "purge" crocodile hunters.

Having just recovered from the jet lag of my return home I had sworn that I would put Palau out of my thoughts; but the lure of exotic green-capped islands, the warm, friendly people, the fantastic blues of the water around the reef and the creamy coral sand beaches would almost be enough to cause me to go back even if there were not the best dive sites in the whole wide world. Add to the best diving in the world the fantastic surface opportunities and you have an unbeatable combination.

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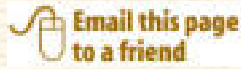
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