



# The QUARTERLY

SUMMER 2014 • FOUR DOLLARS



# SCUBA DIVING

## From Bucket List to Summer Check List

BY TOBY TIBBET

**S**cuba is an acronym for Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus. But a more fitting acronym is Spectacular Colorful Underwater Breathtaking Adventure at an exotic screensaver-caliber destination.

Diving is an admission ticket to another world — a world that comprises 70 percent of the globe and is home to an underwater animal planet hosting darting schools of fish and circling reef sharks at a whiplash-inducing frequency. It's no surprise that scuba diving consistently ranks top 20 on Americans' bucket list.

For the scoop on scuba, we sat down for a candid Q & A with Nick Candelaria, an open-water certified diver, with more than 200 dives in 12 years and a dive log book to die

for, and Ron Beltramo, a PADI-certified instructor trainer at Eco Dive Center in Culver City. They gave us inside information that will inspire you to transfer scuba diving from your bucket list to your completed summer checklist.

**Q: How did you learn to dive?**

**Nick:** I got certified on a resort dive in Jamaica. I didn't plan on learning to dive, but I heard about it at the resort, so I inquired. Four days later, I was certified.

**Q: What's a resort dive?**

**Nick:** It's an introductory, one-day dive resorts offer. The resort takes you and a small group to an amazing, colorful location, with really pretty fish, for a guided, rope-assisted dive in 80-degree water, with no wetsuit and 100-foot visibility. It's meant to hook you! And it does!

You sign up for a four or five-day certification training program that costs \$300-400 and go home certified.

**Q: Can you get certified before your trip?**

**Nick:** You can take a PADI class [Professional Association of Diving Instructors] at your local dive shop or sporting goods store. The class combines coursework, classroom time, 'confined time' in a pool, and 'open-water time' in a lake or ocean.

**Q: What's the most important factor to consider when selecting a dive school?**

**Ron:** That it's five-star PADI rated.

**Q: Why pick PADI? What sets them apart from other certifying agencies?**

**Ron:** They're more detailed,

more modern, up-to-date.

**Q:** Realistically, how long does it take to get certified? And how much does it cost for everything (course materials, equipment, gear, and dive time)?

**Ron:** You can do it in a weekend. \$300 for the scuba diver certification, \$600 for the open-water-diver certification. Basically, \$300 a weekend for everything, even a boat trip to an island, three meals, a captain and crew, dive masters, assistants, an instructor, and three separate dive sites to marine-protected sites where you see more fish and creatures. If someone wants a third weekend, to become an advanced diver, it's another \$300. So, \$900 for all three weekends to become advanced-certified which shows you how to go deep and experience nitrogen narcosis, [which makes you feel like you've had] laughing gas at the dentist. (After, you have to do puzzles to see how you react to it).

**Q:** Can you do part of your training with a local dive shop then complete the final dives at a resort?

**Ron:** Yes, we call it a referral. You do two-thirds of your training here, then complete your four open-water dives in warm water.

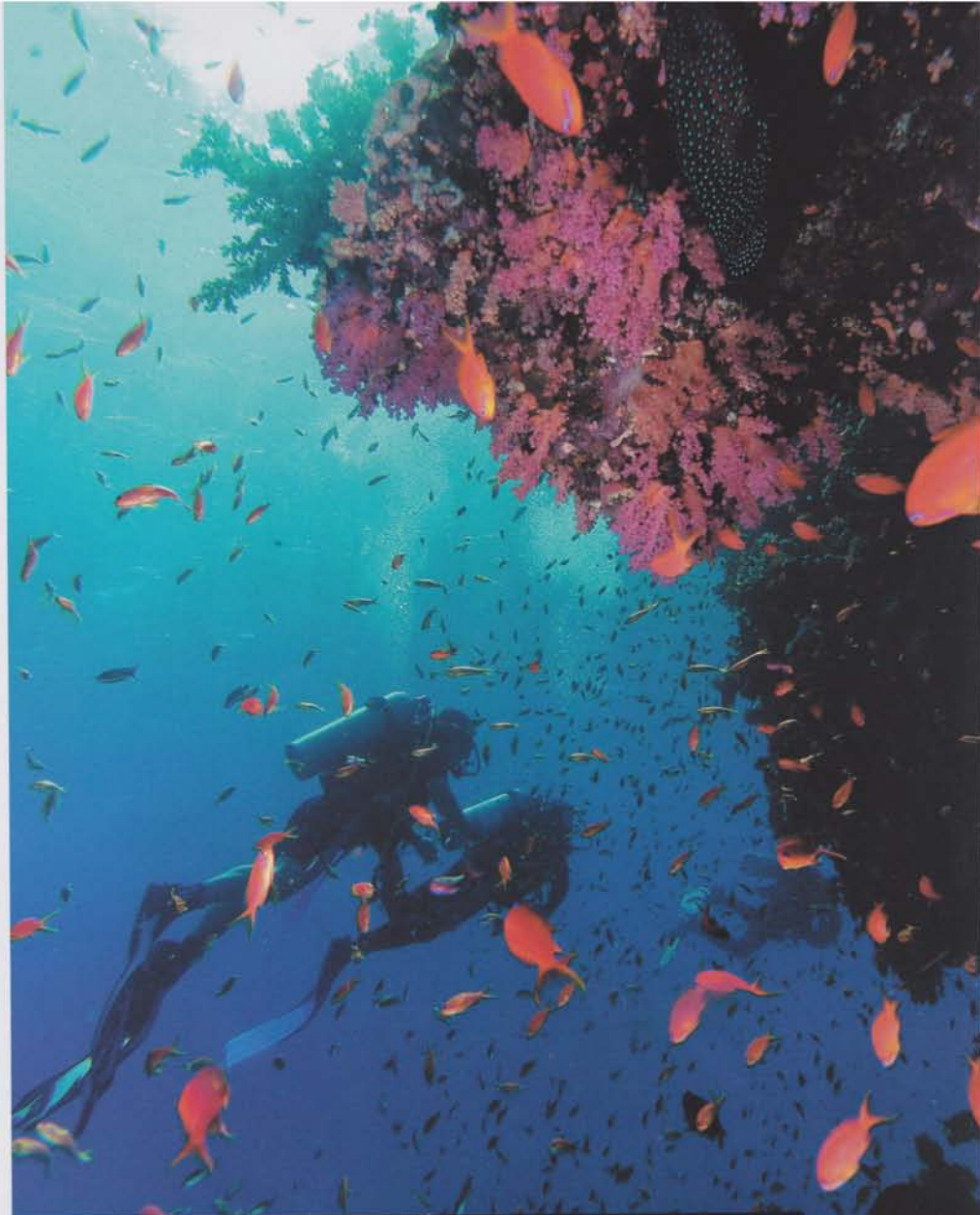
**Q:** Break down the certifications.

**Ron:** There are two. One is called scuba diver. That one is done in one weekend. Scuba diver is for someone who only wants to dive on vacation with a guide. The other is done in two weekends and allows the diver to independently dive with a buddy. It's called open-water diver.

**Q:** To the person who has a fear of water, but really wants to try scuba, what would you say?

**Nick:** I'd tell them it feels like you're floating in space. It's silent. It's calm. It's good to be calm so you don't breathe fast, otherwise you go through air too fast and shorten your dive time. Once you're down there, don't worry, everyone checks in by flashing back the 'OK' sign.

**Ron:** Take a 'discovery dive' the Saturday before, to see if you like it. It involves breathing, getting used to sounding like Darth Vader and feel-



DIVERS SWIM WITH SQUIRRELFISH (AKA PUNK ROCK FISH, NAMED FOR THEIR MOHAWK-STYLE DORSAL FIN).



A DIVER BEFRIENDS AN ORANGE-FIN ANEMONÉFISH (AMPHIPRION CHRYSOPTERUS) AT KADAVU ISLAND, FIJI. PHOTO CREDIT: DEREK TARR, WILDOCEANPHOTO.COM.



ing the weightlessness, which is the most fun part of scuba. It costs \$99 and lasts about an hour and a half.

**Q: Do you have to pass a fitness (waterman) test before you can enroll in training?**

**Ron:** Yes. A 300-yard snorkel-swim or a 200-yard normal swim, and you must be able to float on your back for 10 minutes, unassisted.

**Q: What's your best advice for people wanting to take up the sport?**

**Nick:** Don't buy equipment right away. Beginners tend to get excited and rush out and spend \$300 to \$400 on equipment, then life happens, things get in the way, they can't afford to put it to use. Rent equipment on a couple of trips. Try it out. Some people feel weird about using other people's regulators, but I assure you, they clean them. Do your research before buying. Also, make sure you keep a dive log. Include the date, location, depth, duration, temperature, conditions, and equipment. The dive master signs and stamps it. Always bring it along. When I've wanted to go on dives that are typically considered 'advanced', I've shown them my log book; once they see how many dives and different sites I've dived, they wave me on.

**Ron:** Dive during the better months. There are peak seasons for a reason. Pay the few extra bucks to go when the diving is at its best. It's worth it.

**Q: Let's talk diving etiquette.**

**Nick:** Don't touch anything. Leave the environment as you found it so everyone can enjoy it. Keep a respectful distance from other divers. Don't kick-up sand with your fins. Be calm. Tip the guides. They don't get paid much. They help you with your gear. They do hook-up, set-up, switch your tanks, help you take off your gear, and clean your equipment. They also set up food and drinks in between dives — during 'surface intervals' — when you have to rest to get the nitrogen out of your system.

**Q: What's the No. 1 misconception new divers have?**

SCHOOLING BIGEYE TREVALLY (*CARANX SEXFASCIATUS*) ENCIRCLE A DIVER AT MARY ISLAND, SOLOMON ISLANDS. PHOTO CREDIT: DEREK TARR, WILDOCEANPHOTO.COM.



A DIVER OBSERVES THE TREELIKE SKELETONS OF PLANKTON-EATING SEA FANS NEAR KADAVU ISLAND, FIJI. PHOTO CREDIT: DEREK TARR, WILDOCEANPHOTO.COM.

**Ron:** They're scared of the marine life and the sharks at first, but after their first encounter with them, that changes. They realize the shark is annoyed at seeing, hearing and smelling them — a big, rubbery, Darth Vader machine-thing — they end up following the shark, not the other way around.

**Q:** How long does one tank last?

**Nick:** Forty minutes, on average, [depending on the size of the person, their lungs, and their comfort level] and it tells you when you have 10-15 minutes to resurface.

**Q:** How deep are most dives?

**Ron:** Around 60 feet for beginners, but that's why people take the advanced class so they can experience about 100 feet. Due to global

warming, you have to go deeper because the reefs are 'bleaching' from hotter water.

**Q:** What's an average dive trip cost?

**Nick:** \$1800 to \$2500 for airfare and lodging, plus a two-tank dive at \$100 per day, for three or four days; that's an additional \$300-400.

**Q:** What are your go-to diving and destination resources?

**Nick:** PADI, Diver magazine, Caribbean Travel + Life magazine.

**Q:** Where can you find the best local diving? People often mention Catalina Island and San Clemente.

**Nick:** I've heard very cool, really positive things about Catalina.

**Ron:** Yes, they're good. We list several great spots on our website.

**Q:** We figured new divers



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would be eager to take a lot of underwater 'selfies', so we asked local professional photographer Derek Tarr (who runs photography workshops in Fiji) for tips. Tarr's advice: Opt-out of photo ops! 'You really need to allow diving to become second nature before you even think about taking pictures.' Do you agree?

Nick: Totally.

Ron: 100 percent.

### Nick's Top Six Dive Picks

**BORA BORA** — "The echelon. But it's very, very expensive."

**BELIZE** — "There's so much to do. There are excursions, ruins, fishing... You don't have to be a diver to have a great time."

**CAYMAN ISLANDS** — "Beautiful, but expensive."

**COZUMEL** — "The most bang for your buck. It's easy to get to, has 80-degree water with 100 feet visibility and dive sites for every skill level. A one-week all-inclusive trip costs as little as \$1500."

**BAHAMAS** — "Where you'll see the coolest stuff. The color of the water is amazing, the sand is powder-white, the visibility is 100 feet. You'll see the coolest, biggest fish; lots of hammerhead and reef sharks, barracuda, grouper, lobster and crab."

**BONAIRE** — "An advanced diver's mecca. It's off the hurricane belt so you can go anytime of the year. It has great shore diving."

### Yelp's Top Three Local Dive Shops & Sporting Goods Stores

#### Eco Dive Center

[ecodivecenter.com](http://ecodivecenter.com)  
Culver City  
(888) ScubaLA

#### Dive N' Surf

[divensurf.com](http://divensurf.com)  
Redondo Beach  
(310) 372-8423

#### Aqua Adventures Unlimited

[divingburbank.com](http://divingburbank.com)  
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