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# BIG BLUE

DIE SCHÖNSTEN  
TAUCHREVIERE  
DER WELT



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*Links: Kaiserpinguine schwimmen unter den Eisschollen der Antarktis.*

# EINLEITUNG

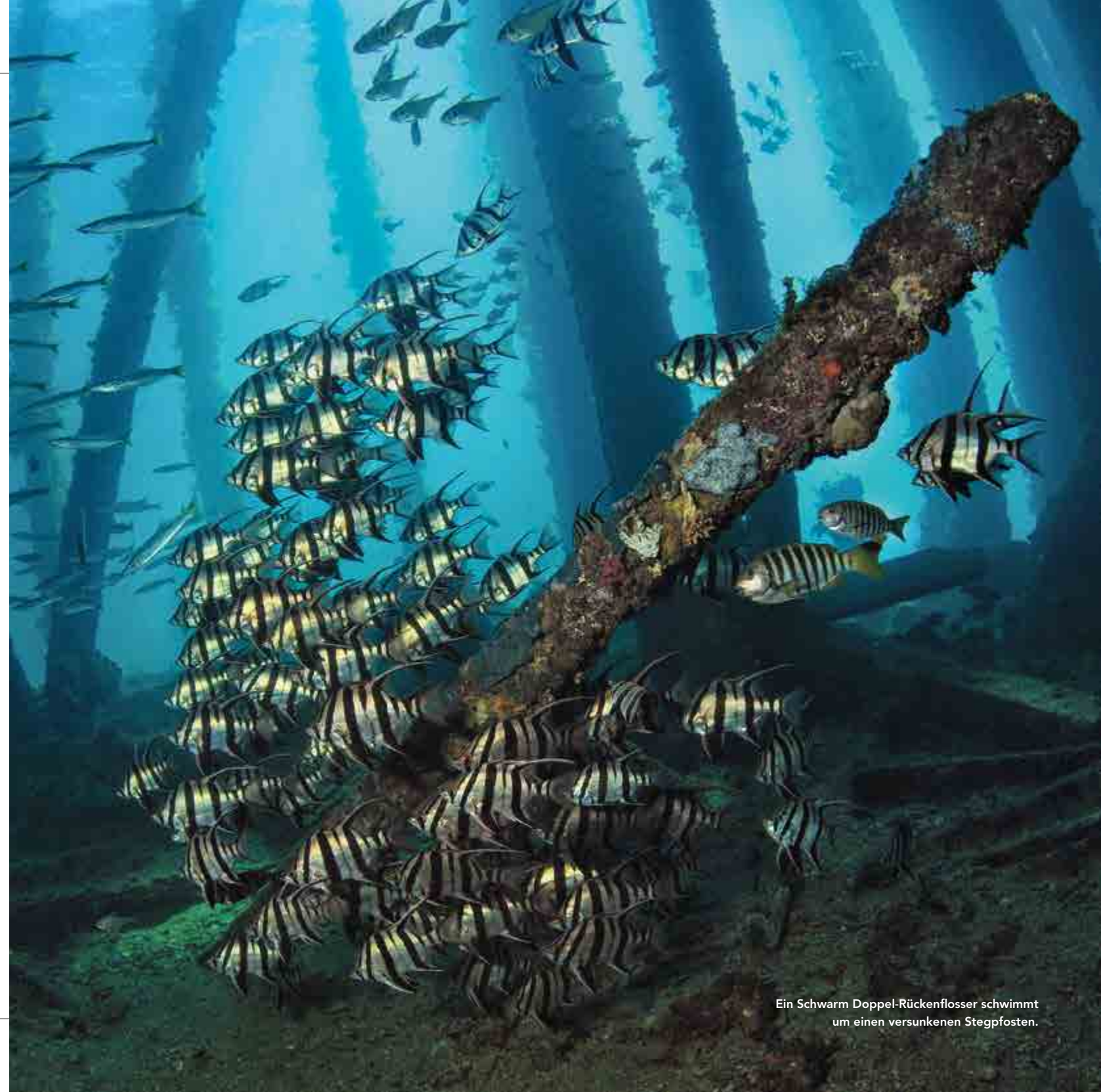
Oceans have historically been something that has separated us. *An ocean apart. Across the sundering seas. The oceans between us.* Now, more than ever before, we understand the sea connects us. It is our shared life support system, a borderless expanse linking one continent with the next. It is our collective history, witness to fledgling seafaring attempts that advanced to legendary voyages, ghastly battles, and staggering discoveries.

Yet, although the sea knows us, we hardly know her. The ocean covers 70 percent of our planet's surface, but more than 80 percent is still unexplored. We don't even *know* what we don't know. For explorers, that's a heady tonic. It's why we dive.

Divers know the pang of disappointment reaching the half-tank mark when there's still so much more to discover. Divers understand the rich wonder of seeing a different world—full of color and life—play out in front of their eyes, a world few people get to observe. This shared experience creates a community of fellow adventurers.

But if there is one commonality among scuba divers, it is their diversity: From macrophotographers to ice enthusiasts, cave divers to reef lovers, divers' passions are as varied as the ocean itself. This made compiling a list of the world's 100 best dive destinations a mighty challenge. We spoke with National Geographic's underwater photographers and Explorers, passionate divers all. We also canvassed legions of divers from around the world on their favorite places to dive, locations that offered unique experiences, squadrons of marine life, discoveries great and ghost-shrimp small.

The result was a list that is inspirational, exciting, and will no doubt be hotly contested. You'll find perennial favorites like Australia's Great Barrier Reef (page 204) and Belize's Great Blue Hole (page 384). We've also included some adrenaline pumpers (like the Aliwal Shoal sardine run, page 300), stuff of legends (like the fabled Bikini Atoll, page 368), eerie wrecks, and one-of-a-kind experiences. (A no-vis hunt for megalodon teeth, anyone? See page 268.) In between are plenty of enjoyable, fish-filled destinations to add to your bucket list, from New Zealand's Poor Knights Islands (page 124) to the Galápagos (page 270).



Ein Schwarm Doppel-Rückenflosser schwimmt um einen versunkenen Stegpfosten.

MEXIKO

# EL BOILER

*Eine Fülle von pelagischen Arten auf einer abgelegenen Inselkette*

**AVERAGE WATER TEMP:** 76°F (24.4°C) **AVERAGE VISIBILITY:** 67 feet (20.4 m)

**AVERAGE DEPTH:** 83 feet (25.3 m) **TYPE OF DIVE:** Open water

The roiling surf immediately clarifies where El Boiler got its name. Located off the northwest coast of the Revillagigedo Archipelago's San Benedicto Island, a wholly Martian-looking landscape, El Boiler might look a fright, but 100 feet (30.5 m) under the surface, the beast turns into a beauty.

Divers descend near an aesthetic pinnacle, which rises 165 feet (50.3 m) to 20 feet (6 m) below the surface. The rocky, volcanic landscape is clothed in a few hard corals, but that's not the main attraction: Revillagigedo is renowned for its animal-centric dives, and this one (once you get past the surge, current, and 24-hour boat trip to get here) is a relatively simple one. Find a quiet spot around the 100-foot (30 m) mark, hunker down, and watch the show.

Manta rays—enormous, graceful, and playful—swoop in to be cleaned by colorful orange-and-electric-blue clarion angelfish, which are endemic to the area. Usually four or five manta rays make an appearance on every dive, and they seem oddly attracted to scuba divers, swimming near for a closer look, aiming for the bubble stream. One theory is that, because this is their cleaning station, the manta rays consider scuba divers to be another perk in their spa, enjoying the feel of bubbles rippling across their bellies.

*“The life we observed at Revillagigedo was beyond our imaginations. This is the wildest place in tropical North America. It is a rare place of large fish, with biodiversity as if the Galápagos Islands had opened a branch in Mexico.”*

—ENRIC SALA, MARINE ECOLOGIST AND AUTHOR OF *PRISTINE SEAS*



Ein großer vulkanförmiger Felsen bietet sowohl Tauchern als auch Fischen alle Möglichkeiten.

COSTA RICA

# KOKOS-INSEL

*Wo pura vida eine Schatzkammer für Meereslebewesen ist*

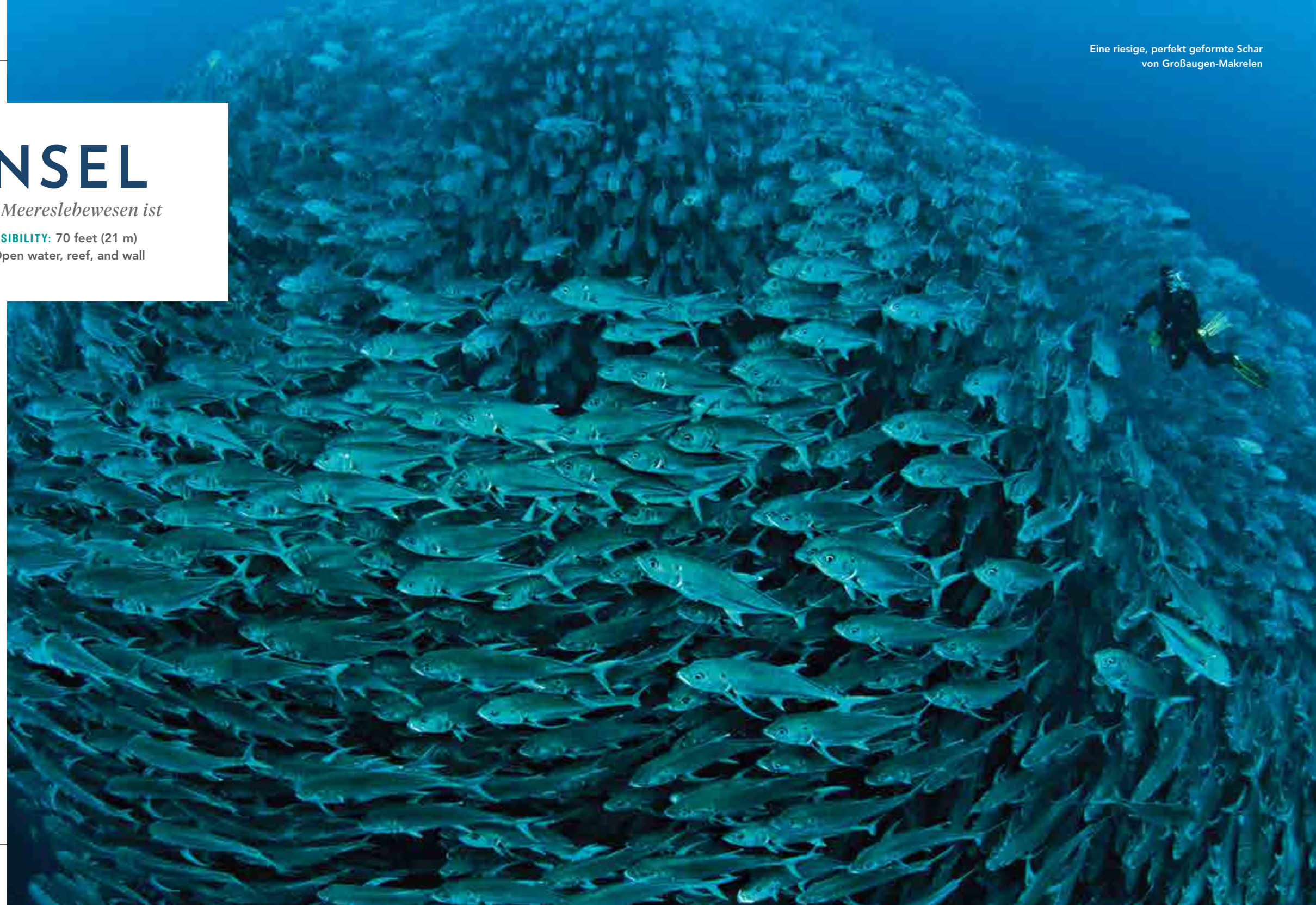
**AVERAGE WATER TEMP:** 81°F (27°C) **AVERAGE VISIBILITY:** 70 feet (21 m)  
**AVERAGE DEPTH:** 80 feet (24 m) **TYPE OF DIVE:** Open water, reef, and wall

Historians estimate there's more than a billion dollars of plundered pirate treasure buried on Cocos Island.

It's a good hiding spot. Located 342 miles (550.4 km) off Costa Rica in the vast Pacific Ocean (and almost the same distance from the Galápagos Islands), Cocos is the only eastern Pacific island with a tropical rain forest, a green canopy of camouflage for a small emerald piece of land, a mere five miles (8 km) long, easy to miss.

But if you're thinking about hunting for some ill-gotten gold to fund future diving trips, think again: Cocos Island is now a protected UNESCO World Heritage site.

Don't be too heartbroken. Cocos's real treasure lies under the surface: Schooling hammerhead sharks, 100 or more, circle in the converging, nutrient-rich currents of the Golden Triangle, an area extending from Malpelo Island (page 350) to the northernmost Galápagos Islands (Wolf and Darwin, page 270) to Cocos Island. This area is home to some of the most impressive and abundant marine life found in the ocean, and you can share the water with them in Cocos. Manta rays cruise past looking for



Ein Taucher nähert sich, um eine ruhende Grüne Meeresschildkröte zu betrachten.



## BORNEO

# PULAU SIPADAN

*All die Unterwasserwelt, von der Sie geträumt haben – auf einer Insel*

**AVERAGE WATER TEMP:** 82°F (27.8°C)   **AVERAGE VISIBILITY:** 66 feet (20 m)  
**AVERAGE DEPTH:** 75 feet (22.9 m)   **TYPE OF DIVE:** Open water

Would the diving world have discovered Pulau Sipadan (Sipadan Island) without Jacques Cousteau? Perhaps, but it would have taken a while to plumb the underwater secrets of this unassuming, tiny, Tic Tac-shaped coral island without him.

Tucked an hour's boat ride off the northeastern corner of Borneo in the Celebes Sea, you can walk the entire perimeter of Sipadan in less than 30 minutes. Most visitors turn their eyes upward on this declared bird sanctuary (established in 1933), searching out kingfishers, wood pigeons, sea eagles, sunbirds, and starlings that make Sipadan's dense vegetation home.

But the hidden gems are encased by the island's crystal clear waters, a rich underwater world Cousteau referred to as an untouched piece of art, thereby registering Sipadan on every diver's radar.

**What You'll See:** Barracuda ● Bumphead Parrotfish ● Jacks ● Turtles (Green and Hawksbill) ● Frogfish ● Leaf Fish ● Pygmy Seahorses ● Sharks (Zebra, Whitetip Reef, Gray Reef, Hammerhead) ● Manta Rays ● Nudibranchs ● Coral (Sea Fans, Staghorn, Table, Barrel Sponges)

**Big Blue** entführt zu den 100 besten Tauchrevieren der Erde und verspricht spektakuläre Erlebnisse mit Tiefgang für alle tauchenden »Ozeanforscher«.

Carrie Miller, Brian Skerry  
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