



# PALAU













OFFROAD-ADVENTURE: JUNGLE TOUR HAVING THE CHARACTER OF AN EXPEDITION

NATURE AND TIME ARE ALLIES – THEY EVEN EAT CANONS



**PALAU HAS WELL EARNED A PLACE TO BE AMONGST THE TOP TEN OF THE BEST DIVING REGIONS. THE LITTLE GREEN ISLANDS IN TURQUOISE WATERS HAVE BECOME SYNONYMOUS FOR A PERFECT DIVING HOLIDAY. IT IS ABUNDANT WITH CORAL REEFS, SHARKS AND WRECKS!**

**M**y husband Udo and I came to Palau for one good reason: to gawk at fish. There are over 1500 species of fish and over 700 different corals colonising the reefs. Of course, there are other things for us to discover, such as the wrecks from the Second World War.

Fascinated from Palau were the adventurous couple Tova and Navot Bornovski. They fulfilled their dream in 1997 and opened the dive centre Fish'n Fins on the main island of Koror. Over the years they added two modern liveboards as well as helicopter rides and off-road jungle tours.

It's my first day in paradise and adventure awaits. Navot has pulled up outside with the Polaris Quads. They're ideal for use in extreme terrain. With a sense of foreboding, I take

my seat. Everybody must learn to drive them and after a trial run the tour begins.

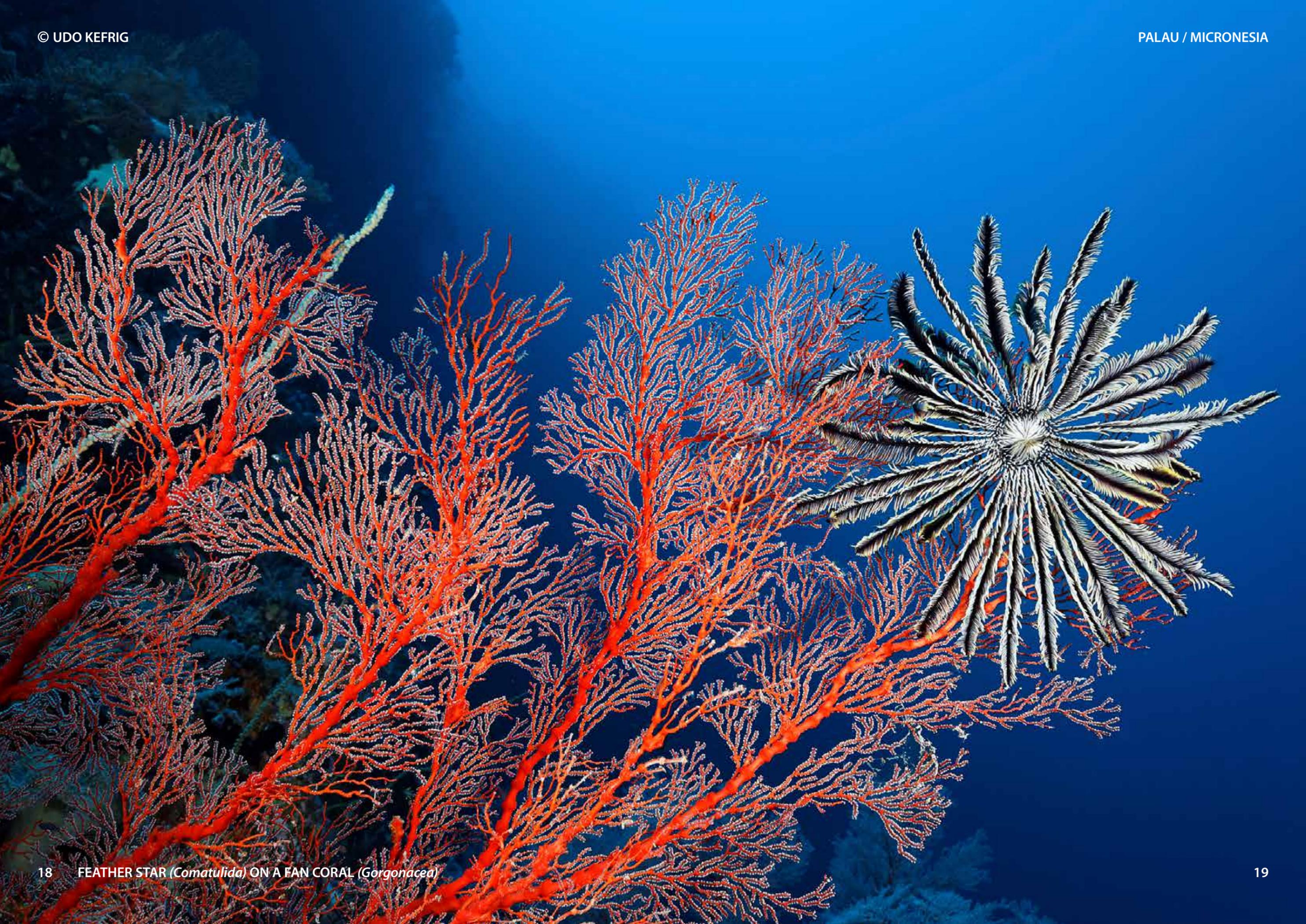
**SUDORIFIC**

The dense jungle is bathed in a diffuse light. It is stuffy and humid. I pass giant old trees, bump over roots and slither through mud holes. The path is flanked by flowers and orchids. Through the loud chorus of birds, strange noises can be heard. Different coloured, iridescent insects are sitting on tree branches that stretch towards the light. The slightest physical activity and sweat trickles down my face, oozing out of every pore. This heat and high humidity are a challenge. All I want to do right now is dive, but it serves me right – in for a penny in for a pound. An unfamiliar sound turns out to be the gurgling of a river that rises to a roar as we approach. Navot had deliberately >



THE JUNGLE ALSO CRUMBLES ARMOURED STEEL







**HOLIDAY AND NATURE PARADISE FOR ACTIVE HOLIDAYMAKER ABOVE AND UNDER WATER**



**PIDGEON (*Caloenas nicobarica*)**  
**TRADITIONAL MENS HOUSE**

chosen this spot and the waterfall is the highlight of our tour. Cascading water plunges foamily into a pool below. Clothes are cast aside, and we take a refreshing dip in this wild and romantic »hell«.

The trip back is less perspiring and leads on to plateaus with a cooling wind. From here we can admire fantastic views over gentle landscapes, towards Rock Islands and small settlements amongst the foothill. Overgrown with vegetation are traces of World War II relics. The remnants of an Ivy-covered war shelter is an eyesore. For years, the only inhabitants have been huge spiders and bats. A bit uncomfortable I look around – my photographer is waiting stoically in front of the entrance.

Palau's island names sound like an adventure: Babeldaop, Ukukthapel, Eil Malk, Ngerol, Peleliu and Angaur. The following day we

explore the labyrinth of mangrove swamps, channels, beaches and caves with canoes. A recommended route is along the Shimizu River, which leads through the jungle and along the mangrove forests. There are mosquitoes everywhere. The bloodthirsty monsters seem to like me. Annoying Pests!

Underneath my canoe chase small fish, which in turn attract larger ones. Fascinated I stare at the hustle and bustle. Something big and dark distracts me! This is the moment that can turn a relaxed tour into a horror trip. A crocodile suddenly appears – gasping and with his mouth wide open. It checked me out and decided I'm not worth eating. The Saltwater crocodiles live in this river as there is plenty of food for them. While I'm still pondering about who will devour me first, the crocodile or the mosquitoes, the tour is already over.

For those who prefer a bird's eye view of Palau, a scenic, awesome helicopter tour can be arranged by the dive centre.

**TOP SPOTS UNLIMITED**

Three ocean currents merge together in Palau. They provide rich nutrients and a high density of marine life. Big fish can be spotted at all dive sights – in fact, the stronger the current, the more you see. But Palau is not a diving area for wimps and no doubt, the better your scuba diving experience and fitness, the more fun you'll have. At the diving centre are divers from all over the world. The chatter of language resembles the colourful hustle and bustle of the reefs. The excursions to the dive sites start early in the morning.

To the south is Ngemeli Island. Here are the well-known spots such as »Blue Corner«, >

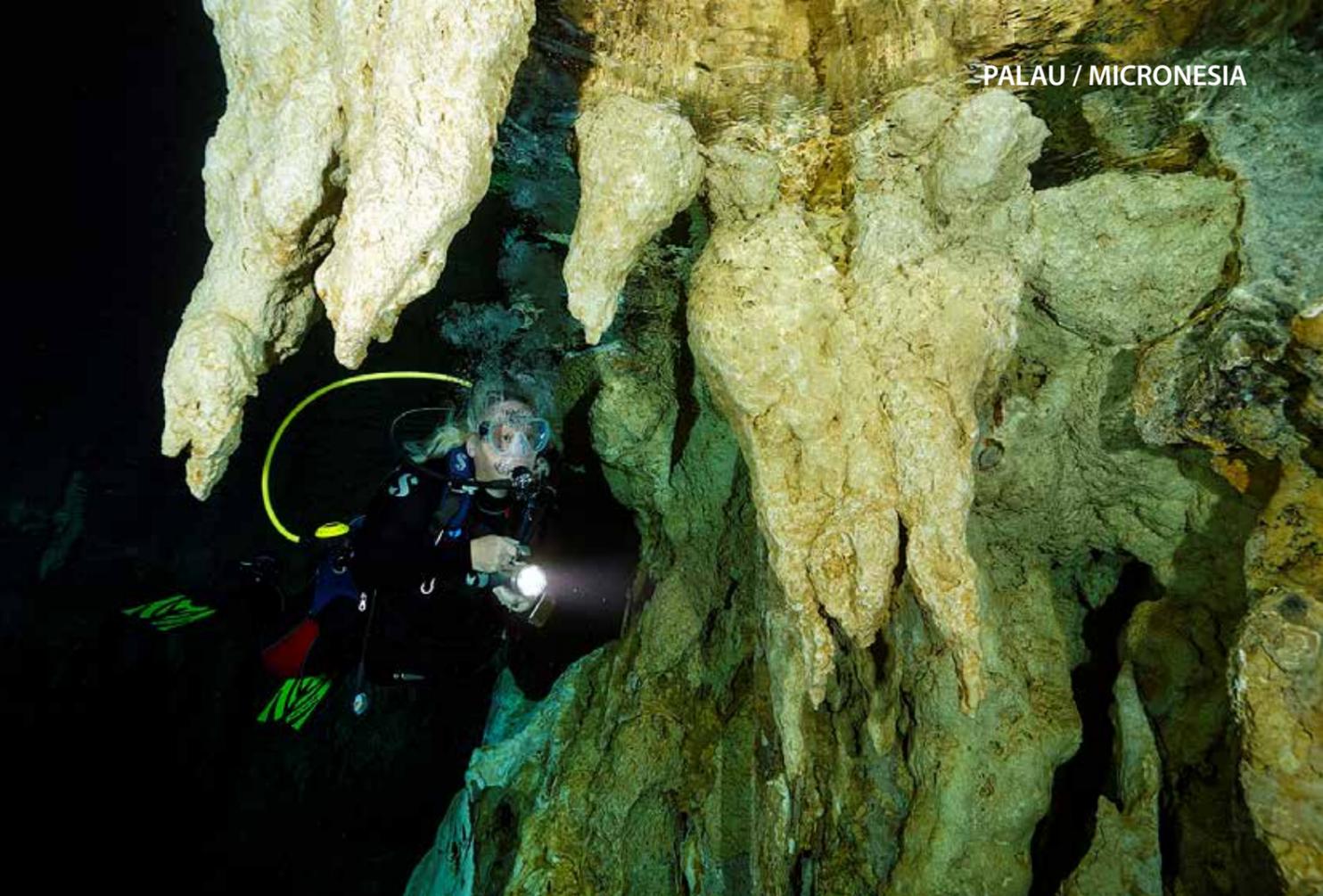


22 LARGE CORAL FAN (*Gorgonacea*) AT »TURTLE WAL«



AT »BLUE HOLE« FOUR HOLES AT THE ENTRANCE LEAD TO A CAVERN 23





### MYSTICAL: THE »CHANDELIER CAVE« IMPRESSES WITH IMPOSING STALACTITES

»Big Drop Off« and »New Drop Off« located. At the dive spot »Blue Hole«, four holes lead from the top of the reef into a wide cavern offering wonderful light effects. A further exit is on the outer reef side. In a side-branching tunnel, one is confronted with the skeleton of a turtle.

The »Turtle Wall« convinces as a steep wall with soft, fan and whip corals. When the current stops, bumphead parrotfish, reef sharks and a rich, small fish world can be observed. During currents, dense schools of fish dance in blue water.

Near the island of Ulong you can find the western reefs with the dive sites named »Siaes Tunnel«, »Siaes Corner«, »Ulong Sand Bar« und »Ulong Channel«. Particularly spectacular are the drift dives along the walls. It's a playground for Tunas, mackerel, barracudas and sharks.

Near Koror, is the imposing »Chandelier Cave«, a tunnel system under the tidal zone that leads to the interior of an island. It consists of four chambers, and in some, you can breathe freely. Amazing stalactites glisten and sparkle in the light of our torches. Look closely for tiny shrimps.

However, there is more to Palau than just large fish. Life rages in the reefs right down to the tiny macro reef dwellers. These critters battle day and night for the best spots in the current. It scurries and crawls in every niche, cave and crevice.

### SEX IN THE SEA

Sexperience on the reef – this too is offered. You've scarcely submerged, when the first pair appear out of the blue. Soon, more and more join in. They swirl in the current like a ➤

### GLITTER AND GLAMOR: CHRYSTAL DOTS SPARKLE IN THE TORCHLIGHT



A TURTLE SKELETON IN A TUNNEL AT »BLUE HOLE«







RED AND BLACK SNAPPER (*Lutjanidae*) GATHER IN LARGE SHOALS TO SPAWN AT FULL AND NEW MOON IN OPEN WATER CLOSE TO THE REEF

fast-moving cloud. Silvery slithery bodies rub against each other. Their happy hormones are bursting. Don't worry, it's fish I'm talking about!

The females release their eggs into the open water. The males then ejaculate a thick cloud of sperm over it. I'm surrounded by schools of spawning fish. Sharks and tuna burst unwelcome into a frenzy mating orgy. For them, it's a rich dinner table.

I would have liked to have witnessed the mating of the bumphead parrotfish. It must be a magnificent sight. Unfortunately, we have missed it by a couple of days.

Mating manta rays and sharks are not an uncommon sight in Palau. Especially when diving the »German Channel«. A channel that German colonists pushed through the outer reef in imperial times and thus opened the protected lagoon to the open sea.

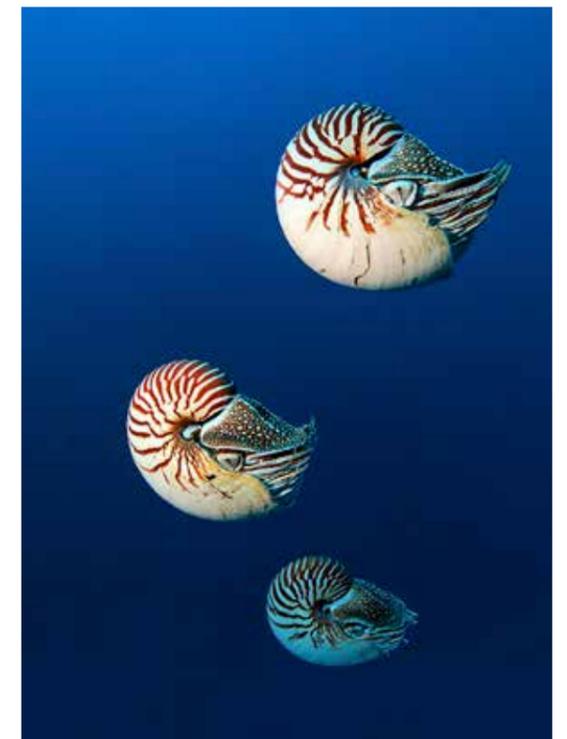
### ADRENALINE RUSH

The main attraction for every diver is »Blue Corner«. No matter how the conditions are, it will always certainly be a drift dive! Because the current changes quickly and unpredictably, a reef hook is mandatory. When it really pumps – the fish spectacle begins. I hook in and watch. There are sharks everywhere! Many grey sharks and dense schools of butterfly fish. A male shark vies for the attention of a female. She ends up with love bites to her back. Tunas shred white meat. Then suddenly a shadow appears over me. »Wham«! A blue fin knocks the regulator out of my mouth; in fact, it very nearly kicked the mask off my face. Right in front of me, is a diver totally oblivious dangling happily on his reef hook. My dive guide quickly comes to the rescue, drags the ogre

away and hooks him to another spot. I finally see my fill of sharks.

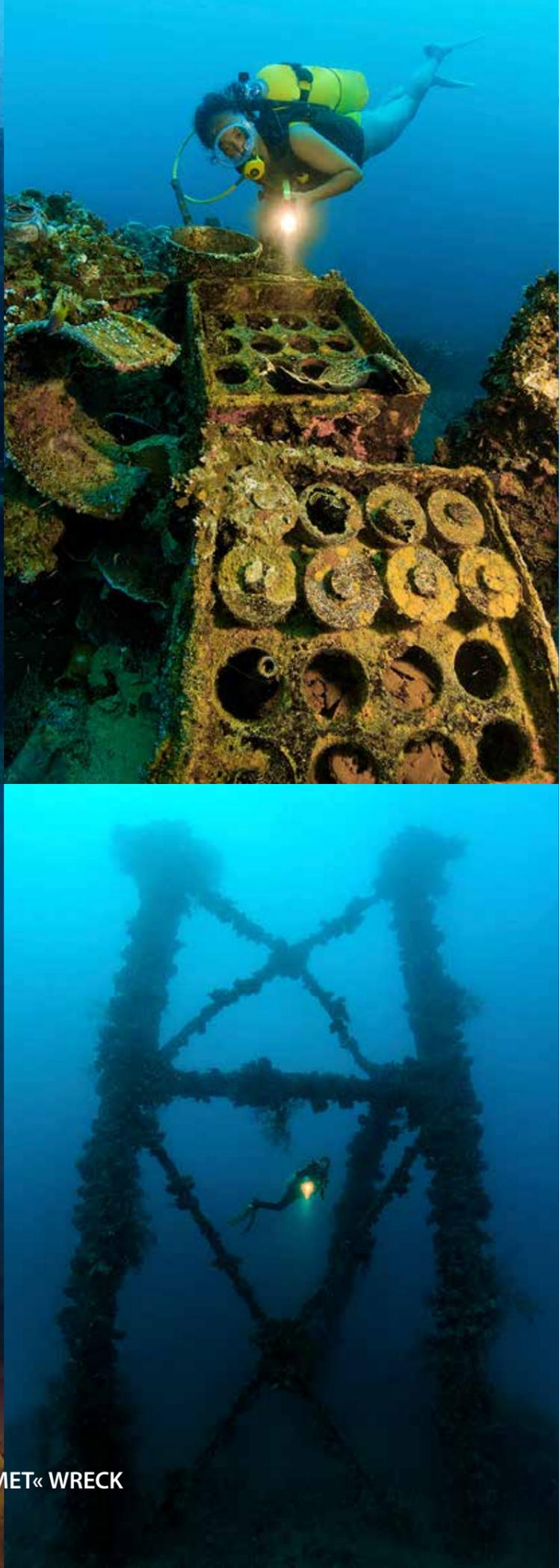
### PREHISTORIC-MOTIFS

The sea is home to many bizarre creatures that look so strange that you might think they were created for photographers. Like the pearl boat, the Nautilus from the cephalopod family. They live somewhere in depths of 150 to 300 metres. When looking for food, they often ascend to 50 metres, especially if they are attracted by chicken parts. There they float into a trap, which is then pulled up to a depth that divers can reach. They can adapt to the ambient pressure. Slowly, the baskets are carefully pulled higher, giving them time to adjust. But the luck of photographers does not last long, the photogenic pearl boats do not like daylight. And they hate the flashlight of the cameras. ➤



ATTACK OF THE SEA A NAUTILUS (*Nautilus belauensis*)







### WITNESSES OF TIME LIKE THE »JAKE FLOAT« CRUMBLE IN THE REEF AND OFFER SHELTER FOR SMALL FISH AND CORALS

With a full belly, they descend slowly and steadily back into the abyss.

Unlike the Nautilus, the Jellyfish in Jellyfish Lake on the island of Eil Malak seek the light. Millions once floated through the small saltwater lake. But the excessive temperatures



**A DRY SPELL NEARLY MEANT THE END FOR JELLYFISH LAKE**

of the last years and a spell of drought almost meant the end for the jellyfish – only a few survived. It remains to be seen whether the once famous lake will be able to recover.

### WRECK-DORADO

Irrespective of your experience with nature, Palau is a Mecca for wreck freaks. Wrecks from the Second World War rest of the island at various depths. For some, they are unattractive rust heaps - for others contemporary witnesses and holy grails of their diving experience.

These are known ship and aircraft wrecks, such as the »Jake Float«, »Iro Maru«, the »Buoy Nr. 6 Wreck«, the »Chuyo Maru« or the »Teshio Maru«.

Navot Bornovski discovered the USS Perley in 2000 together with Jeff Wollenberg. The story was broadcast by CNN and the BBC.

Built in 1920, the ship rammed a mine during demining operations in mid-September 1944, sank and took 159 crew members into the depths. The vessel is now broken in two and lies between 72 and 78 metres on its port side in a sandy environment. Not a wreck dive for the average holiday diver – not least because of the strong currents. Four years later, Navot found a World War II patrol boat north of Kayangel. At the time a small sensation, because it was none other than the later US President George W. Bush, who sank the ship with a hit.

### SHARK PROTECTION

»Sharks and Palau are one«, Tova philosophises and is passionately committed to protecting them.

The Bornowskis have an infinite love for the sea and its inhabitants. »Sharks, espe- ➤



**THE LAST SENTINELS ...**







A SCHOOL OF GREY REEF SHARKS (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*) PATROL IN THE OPEN WATER ON »BLUE CORNER«



TOVA UND NAVOT BORNOVSKI,  
OWNER OF THE OCEAN HUNTER III  
AND DIVE CENTRE FISH FISH 'N FINS

cially the grey sharks, are widespread in the waters of Palau«, explains the shark protector. »They have an important role to play on the reef - and of course are an attraction for the many divers«.

In 2002 Tova founded the »Micronesia Shark Foundation«. Several countries have joined too. And of course, the government of Palau. Tova and its members attend schools, international congresses and maintain contact with all relevant scientists.

Because of her commitment, Tova Bornovski was inducted into the Women Divers Hall of Fame in 2013.

#### PALAU SHARK WEEK

A special event for shark fans is the Palau Shark Week. Each year between February and April, hundreds of grey reef sharks gather

in the waters around Palau for mating. The Fish 'n Fins Dive Centre and the Micronesian Shark Foundation allow divers to observe sharks with experts such as Dr Mark Meekan of A.I.M.S. and the Stanford University team led by Barbara Block.

The date for the next Shark Week has already been set: March 2019. The Shark Week is a popular event and quickly booked up. ■



#### THE AUTHORS

As Team Oceanpics, Rose and Udo Kefrig publish internationally in diving, nature and tourism magazines. Rose is well known for her emotional articles and Udo for his passion for wreck photography. He is also co-author of several wreck and dive guides.

➔ [www.oceanpics.de](http://www.oceanpics.de)

➔ [www.facebook.com/Oceanpics](https://www.facebook.com/Oceanpics)

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

Dive Centre Fish 'n Fins:

➔ [www.fishnfins.com](http://www.fishnfins.com)

➔ [www.oceanhunter.com](http://www.oceanhunter.com)

Palau Royal Resort:

➔ [www.palau-royal-resort.com](http://www.palau-royal-resort.com)

Palau Visitors Authority

➔ [www.visit-palau.com](http://www.visit-palau.com)