

# Nautilus SCUBA Club Newsletter

Cairns QLD Australia

October 2021

Final Issue



Cover photo: Libby Sterling



# Diving with three Townsville operators

By Joanna

March 2021

I joined Remote Area Dive's (RAD) Sunday night dive trip. It's a well organised monthly event providing a simple way to do some night muck dives. Their boat was easy to find at the South Townsville boat ramp and they lift gear up onto the boat, while it's still on the trailer.

Once the boat was in the water and all guests boarded, I set up my gear while the boat was traveling in the protected channel. The Advanced students' group had already set up their gear while the boat was on the trailer, in the car park.

About 20 mins in good weather, so I am told, is all it takes for them to usually get over to Magnetic Island (Maggie). It was about 40 minutes over to the island in the swells of March, a week after Tropical Cyclone Niran.

We left at 3pm, so the first dive was on dusk and we got back to the mainland boat ramp about 8.40pm.

Maggie's cove, for RAD's dusk dive



would highly recommend diving with her and RAD for these night dives.

Pleasure Divers, based on Maggie, dives the same Moltke wreck site, in Geoffrey Bay. I arrived at 9am – time well chosen by them to get the best high tide - and we geared up quickly. Our gear was put in the back of the ute and we drove the short 400m or so to a disused boat ramp. Gearing up in the water was easy enough, despite the usual very slippery rocks along the edges of the old ramp. It was about a 150m surface swim out to the buoy markers.

There is also a snorkeler's trail so if diving without a guide, make sure you know which buoy you are swimming to so as to find the wreck. Although that's not guaranteeing finding the wreck as the Pleasure Divers' trainee dive master was unable to find the wreck. So it was 15 minutes of diving, going outwards in different directions before I spotted the wreck while surfacing for the third time.

Once on the wreck it was magnificent as we had unusually clear vis, in 7 to 10 metres. I had expected another muck dive and instead

RAD boat getting ready to launch



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the lucky conditions provided a rare opportunity. It was a gentle drift dive one way along the wreck and then we pushed back into the current so as to drift once more along the approximately 50 metres length of the wreck. Terrific diversity of fish and corals and the unmistakable structure of the 1870s boat could be seen. A favourite was the bluespotted maskray who came into view multiple times as it moved in and out of the metalwork of the wreck and later on the enormous Rock Flathead (known locally as a crocodile shark) that ignored us in its immobility. The large sweetlip, bat fish, tuskfish and barramundi cod seemed to be enjoying the drifting current as much as we were!

Navigation tip: at the further most buoy in the snorkellers trail, look to the south east, towards the open channel past the tip of the bay; the wreck lies outward from the buoy, away from the beach, toward where you are facing. The reef corals are built up over and close to the wreck but due south is sand.

Pleasure Divers shore dive



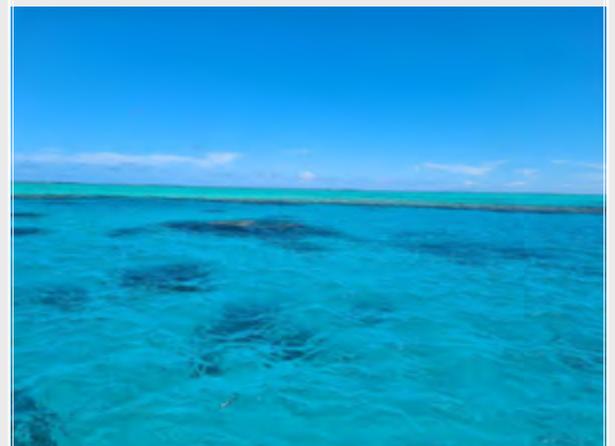
The outer reef, with Adrenalin Dive, two days later was a nice ending to my week in and around Maggie and the 'Ville. I had intended to dive the Museum of Underwater Arts and then the Yongala Wreck two days later but due to low tourist numbers, trips were cancelled. I was told that instead Adrenalin rolled all their customers booked over five days of trips, into one single day trip out to Lodestone Reef. I understand that they chose that site as they had new open water certs as part of the merged group. Lodestone is a stunning reef, with vis of between 25 – 40 metres. It was large bommies in 13 metres, with protected lagoons and donut shaped reefs. The small green clams, star fish of various colours and sizes and the sea worms made this an interesting reef.

I didn't get to see the crew at their best as Adrenalin were severely short staffed at that time, including having borrowed one dive

master staff from Pleasure Dive at the last minute. She was excellent but unfamiliar with the boat, gear location or dive site. Also Paul, Adrenalin's owner, was required to be leading that day's diving, which he said was no longer typical for him. Great to hear his stories and perspectives from his long experience in the industry and his reef talk during the surface interval was particularly brilliant as it focused on the specifics of the central area of the GBR. It was good to learn the contrasts and similarities between the northern areas and Townsville's outer reef.

Costs; traveling solo I always need to arrange a dive buddy/guide and all three operators were able to do that. Pleasure Divers had a modest combined fee for the tanks and dive buddy. The other two operators didn't charge extra for diving with a staff member and or in a small group.

Inspiration: Diveplanit had a Magnetic Island package deal earlier this year that didn't end up working out for me but Deborah Dickson-Smith was generous in her advice and ideas about incorporating shore dives into my own schedule. This blog by Deborah gives more info; [www.diveplanit.com/marine-environment/citizen-science-moua/](http://www.diveplanit.com/marine-environment/citizen-science-moua/)



Lodestone Reef

# Lady Bowen Trip, 15th May 2021

In life, it's tempting to always take the easy path, stick with what you know. No nasty surprises, no buyer's remorse, no sleepless nights second-guessing your choices, just a nice peaceful journey of tranquillity and contentment.

Which all sounds very fine, you might be thinking, but after only a little while I always find it gets distinctly dull.

Go down the other path, though, into wholly uncharted waters, and you never know quite what you're gonna get. Thrill-seeking, it turns out, can be a double-edged sword. What quickens the pulse and girds the loins can just as easily turn in a heartbeat into what scares the bejeezus out of you, and leaves you mentally, physically and quite often financially scarred.



What you really need is something in the Goldilocks zone, something not too hot, not too cold, not too soft, not too hard, but just right. And that's why, when the Nautilus Club announced a special dive-trip to the Lady Bowen, I for one jumped at the chance. Here was something a mite more challenging than your average monthly club dive, but without the need to take time off work, travel for days and days or fork out for fancy tech-gear.

The Lady Bowen lies handily 18 nautical miles south-east of Mission Beach, really only a hop and a skip away. As such it's driveable, and dive-able, within a single day, though several of us followed Goldilocks' lead, choosing to steal an extra night in bed there and make a weekend of it.

This 66m steamer struck the reef in the late 1800s, fortunately without any loss of life, and promptly disappeared under the waves for over a century in 34m of water, until it was rediscovered in 1997 by one of our own veteran Nautilus members, star wreck-finder Kevin Coombes.



The challenges of diving it are several-fold. Firstly, unless you have your own boat and know where to look, you'll be out of luck most weekends, as very few commercial trips will take you there. Ours was to be the first trip run by Mission Beach Dive for the last 5 years. Secondly it sits on the sand in open water, fortunately almost upright but with no surrounding reef, so conditions can be a tad rougher than your average Cairns reef trip

## Lady Bowen Trip, 15th May 2021

both above and below water. And as there's not much boat above 25m, safety stop views will be likely just your fins, your buddy and the rope disappearing into the depths.

Luckily for us, though, a lot of planning and effort had gone into making the day as smooth as possible, depositing us on the wreck at slack-tide on the new moon to limit effects of tide and current. Even so, a few of us chose to generously feed our breakfasts to the fish as we moored up, but all were happy once underwater, things proving much calmer, and our strict instructions to keep a firm grip on the descent line proved largely superfluous.

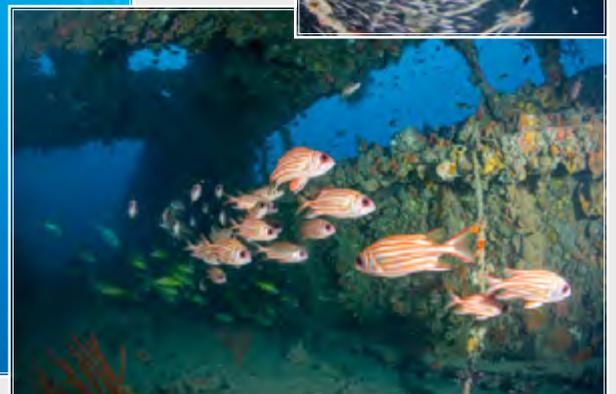
Long before we even reached the wreck a welcoming party came up to greet us, several sea-snakes casting us a wary eye as they bolted to the surface for a gasp of air, blasting by like surreal slithering scaly rockets. They then gave us an even closer inspection on their way down, spiralling round the rope (and our legs!) as they returned down to their feeding grounds.



At 25m, right on cue, the boat finally loomed out of the gloom, and as we neared the bottom we were suddenly surrounded by a swirling shoal of Giant Trevally, like some giant revolving fishy mirror, just the thing to cause confusion as narcosis starts to kick in. Clearing them safely we moved on to explore the ship itself, encrusted with endless clams and soft-corals, and bedecked with a million pulsing glassfish (yep, that's right, I counted them...). Some groups were lucky enough to get buzzed by huge turtles and rays, though sadly the viz saw them glide off into the gloom in only a few seconds, so we'll never know what else we might have missed. Handily the wreck is pretty much the perfect size to cover in the 20-minutes that your nitrox allows, so there's no chance of catching a chill. Then it's back up the rope for a two-hour surface interval (and a scrumptious lunch) to mull over the memories before it's time to do it all over again.

Big Thanks to Nancy, Nigel, Frankie and Marita from Mission Beach Dive for a great day out, and for the 10 Nautilis and our 4 brethren from the Townsville NQUEC for great company over a few beers on the way home. The crew happily deemed the whole trip a success, and there's already talk of doing it all again next year... I'll certainly be signing-on.

So perhaps next time you should think about getting out of your own personal comfort zone, making like Goldilocks and joining us. Just as long as nobody brings along the 3 Bears... ■■■



# Manta Rays Galore

Lady Elliot Trip - 25th - 31st May 2021

by Jannemieke Hanhart



Participants (14 pax): Judy, Akiko, Jim, Colin, Sarah, Jen, Mel, Lee Ann, Sharyn, Susie, Rigo, Jannemieke (Sandra and Karen joined 2 days later travelling with Jetty Divers dive club from Coffs Harbour).

After the flight from Cairns via Brisbane to Hervey Bay, we were taken by 2 small Twin Otters airplanes to Lady Elliott. The small aeroplanes restrict the amount of luggage you can take, though you can buy extra kilos for your diving gear. It is only a 40 minute flight and when we saw the island from the plane, we couldn't believe it, the island looked too tiny!

## Lady Elliot Island

Lady Elliot Island is the southernmost coral cay of the GBR. Situated within a highly protected 'Green Zone', the coral cay is a sanctuary for over 1,200 species of marine life and is known for its abundance of manta rays, turtles, amazing array of spectacular marine life and unspoilt coral reef.

The Lady Elliot Island Eco Resort is really nicely laid out within beautiful gardens. It looks well maintained and all the cabins and rooms looked freshly painted and were clean and surprisingly free of bird shit. It prides itself in being fully ecological and self-sustainable and they have done an amazing job in ongoing revegetation of the island (it was once stripped of its natural vegetation due to guano mining) and returning it to its original biodiverse habitat for birds and marine life.



After landing on the grass air strip, we were greeted by the dive manager and were taken for an introduction tour. Jim's bag with his camera and dive gear had been lost in transition but returned to him the next day.

## Diving

The diving is amazing with marine life seemingly being on steroids. We saw giant loggerhead turtles, hawksbill and green turtles everywhere, all kinds of massive groupers and reef sharks. All seemed 1.5x bigger than normal. Furthermore, the reef looked very healthy with a diverse coral population.

Diving is from small boats that leave from the beach. No dive site is further than 10 min drive. There is no shore diving. The dive shop brings everyone plus gear to the beach where you have to gear up and walk on the beach and coral to the boats.

Initially, the dive shop manager intended to keep our group together which did not work at all - too crowded and chaotic. It took some serious persuasive talent of half of our group to convince the dive coordinator to let us dive in 2 groups, which made it all together way more pleasant. And we met up with Naz, one of the dive instructors and who many know from Aquaquest in Cairns!

We did 2 dives per day – one at 7am and one at 1-2 pm.

Between dives we could snorkel at the Lagoon in front of the Resort. Because of the protection of this area by the reef, the baby turtles and octopuses are not shy and ignore you and just swim right over you if you are not careful.



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(Take note, for those of you who think that the plural of octopus is "octopi" - it is NOT - as it is not a Latin word!). Judy, Sarah and Jen went snorkelling nearly every day to play with the octopuses. The rest of us found it too cold and preferred a nice hot lunch after one try.

The water temperature was initially nearly 25C but dropped later in the week to 23C with a cold current coming in.

Due to the South-easterly wind, we dived on the west side of the island which consists of scattered bommies and a wreck over a sandy bottom with a depth range of 5-21 m. The sea was calm to start with but became quite rough as the days went on and getting out and into the boat was sometimes a challenge. There are also beautiful dive sites on the east side which can be dived when the wind changes.

It was on our second dive that we had our first glimpse of the reef manta rays at Secret Bommie - one of the Lighthouse Bommies - which was very promising! Secret Bommie is one of the cleaning stations one can almost always see manta rays if they are in the neighbourhood. We saw mantas every day from there.



The Lighthouse Bommies are absolute a must-dive site as it seems that most things happen there. Not only do the manta rays glide over you on their way to be cleaned, it is guaranteed a hot meeting spot of white tip sharks, Maori wrasses,

gropers, giant turtles, wobbegongs, eagle rays, etc and is usually covered in schools of glass fish which frame the bigger fish beautifully.



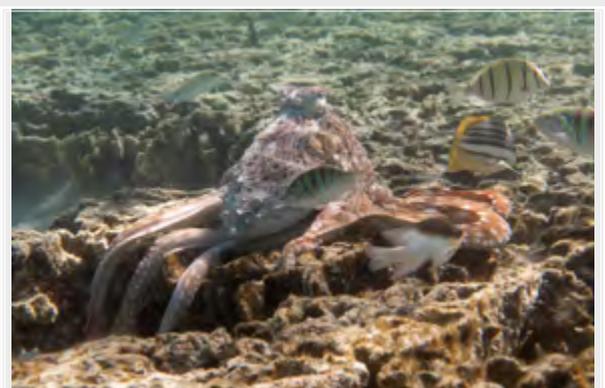
We saw the most manta rays on Day 3- one group saw 15 encounters with the manta rays with 7 different individuals. On one occasion there were 5 mantas swimming around the top of Secret Bommie when 2 wonderful eagle rays passed by. The other group topped this with 17 encounters which the writer only realised afterwards as she thought that it was only 3 rays circling and having a nice coffee break. Apparently, you have to look closely at the patterns on their bellies. Duh.. Most rays have pale bellies with unique spots, but we also saw one with a black belly and another one who was missing one of his cephalon fins - 'face arms'.

There was an octopus who gave us an impressive performance. He had been chased away by a small fish which made him a bit self-conscious.

He subsequently put on a show solely for us to save his fierce image - 'walking' along the bottom and changing colour so fast: "Look I am big and dangerous; now I am beautifully white with spots; now you don't see me, I am a rock; now I am a flat black ghost"-it was mesmerising. While everyone was focused on his performance, we totally missed that 3 mantas had been circling above us.

There is one wreck of a small yacht called Severance. It is a place where you find bull rays, sharks and turtles.

And the best kept secret - Mel did her 300th dive!



# Manta Rays Galore

Lady Elliot Trip - 25th - 31st May 2021

by Jannemieke Hanhart



## Resort activities

The resort offered all kinds of fun and educational activities, guided walks, fish feeding, presentations about the manta rays and other creatures, and various entertainment.

One evening there was Island Bingo and we joined with 3 teams. Competition was fierce, and Lee Ann proved to be even more competitive than Akiko, can you imagine? but Rigo's team won which led Rigo to jeer 'We won, you lose!!', almost bringing the table with a mother and her 3 children to tears. Poor kids, scarred for life... Lee Ann called for a recount, but she lost.

Retail therapy was possible in the reception area - where the resort had a very nice collection of souvenirs and presents.

## Sunset and Lunar eclipse

Every day there were sunset drinks and snacks at the Lighthouse beach. The resort would bring your orders to the beach. With luck the sky turns blood red. On the second day we celebrated Colin's 50th birthday on the beach and he was inundated with presents-which brought him to tears (inside).



Lunar eclipse – We had a perfect spot for the lunar eclipse from the beach front - - with no other lights interfering, the moon was big and rose-coloured - a Super Blood Moon - an impressive display on a back canvas of the glorious Milky Way.



## Connectivity

There was no mobile phone reception - good for a serious internet detox - though you can buy (very limited) internet access. Only at the Lighthouse was some (Telstra) reception available so Mel walked every night to the Lighthouse to commune with the rest of the world. She did not realise until later that she had risked meeting the resident ghost - the wife of the late lighthouse keeper who is rumoured to have died under mysterious circumstances. There were questions whether she had killed herself or was killed by her husband as some blood traces had been found on the lighthouse stairs. She was a confirmed resident ghost as many staff members had seen her and a small child visitor a few weeks earlier had seen a lady waving to her from the lighthouse while her parents saw no one.



Initially, the weather was quite sunny and nice, day time temperatures around 23C. Karen and Sandra, together with the Jetty Divers from Coffs Harbour arrived 2 days later and brought a turn in the weather (storm and strong currents!). For Jim and Colin they proved to be saviours as they had been bored out of their heads at night with everyone tucking in early. Karen introduced them to some latenight board games which became funnier and funnier the more gin they imbibed. They were a bit vague on details though.



# Manta Rays Galore

Lady Elliot Trip - 25th - 31st May 2021

by Jannemieke Hanhart



## Summary

### Highlights:

- Sea life on steroids - huge sea turtles, sharks, rays, grofers, etc
- Manta rays
- Lagoon snorkels with close-up encounters with junior turtles and octopuses
- Pleasant and clean resort with good food and nice rooms
- Lots of other activities offered - tours, walks, presentations, games

### Considerations

- Boats are basic and you have to walk over the coral to the boat fully geared up.
- For some, climbing back in proved to be a challenge, especially when the sea is choppy.
- Diving is always with a dive guide. That worked mostly well after they got to know the group.
- Important to discuss diving arrangements for a group booking in advance.
- Groups of 6 are the best and should be no more than 8.
- Breakfast times and first dives seemed to clash initially. Arrange access for full breakfast after the dive, with perhaps a small bit before.

We had a very good time at Lady Eliot Island. It is beautiful and peaceful, diving is spectacular and the eco resort offers great food and accommodation, It is definitely a 'must go to' dive destination.

(This report is written in collaboration with Akiko, Jen, Lee Ann, Rigo, Karen and Sandra.)



# Minke Whale Trip 16-20 July 2021

by Karen Winfield

So the minke whales were a bit shy turning up this trip – they kept us waiting for quite some time, but time wasn't wasted at all waiting. We had fabulous dives, fun conversations and some interesting encounters.....

Here's a little tale from Karen Winfield:

On the morning of our second day, we ate our breakfast while being told there were Minkes circling the boat. Minke bait.... Toby.. was out on the Minke line attempting to entice them to stick around.

I finished breakfast in quick time and got suited up in record time to be the first in the water. The sea was pretty rough compared to the previous days which made waiting around on the minke line a little difficult; with sea water piling into my snorkel, I was choking on regular occasions - flailing about on the surface like an injured seal!

I had just been thinking to myself, 'it's no wonder sharks don't come check us out given our awkwardness in the rough seas' when, out of the corner of my eye; about 3-4 m behind Master Reef Guide Michelle, I saw something moving. My first thought was that the minke's had finally shown up, but as it moved behind the bouy, I saw the distinctive stripes of a Tiger shark coming to check us out! Moving majestically as it cruised past us...

I scrambled to get my Go Pro on; but once that Tiger realised we were humans and not an injured fish or seal on the surface, it was off. I managed to get the tail end of it swimming away from us.... and that was it. 5 seconds of excitement while waiting for Minkes to not show up again!!

## Song for the Minke Whale trip July 2021 – by Rigo Van Meer

On a sunny winter day  
We all went to sea  
Looking for the Minke whale  
We really died to see

### First Day

Did you see the Minke whale?  
No, but I saw a shrimp  
Oh that is fantastic, that is so  
amazing  
Shrimps are really supercool  
They just blow you away

I nearly saw a wobbegong  
But it had just swam along  
I almost saw that devil ray  
It must have been too far away

### Second Day:

Did you see the Minke whale?  
No, but I saw a trout  
Oh that is fantastic, that is so  
amazing  
Trouts are really supercool  
They just blow you away

They all saw that stonefish  
But I just passed it by  
I would have loved to see it  
Maybe another try

### Third Day:

Did you see the Minke whale?  
No, but we saw a goby  
Oh that is fantastic, that is so  
amazing  
Gobies are really supercool  
They just blow you away

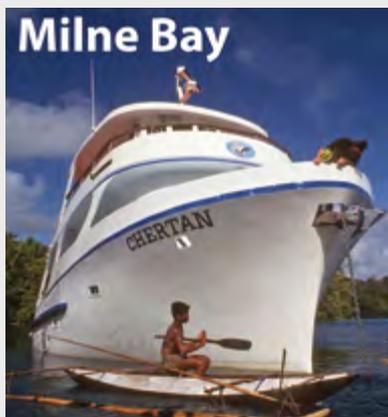
So the trip was truly awesome  
And we were satisfied  
We kept our smiles and kept our  
mood  
And nobody really cried

### Fourth day:

Hey did we see the Minke whale?  
Yes, we saw almost three!  
Oh that is fantastic, that is so  
amazing  
Minkes are really supercool  
They just blow you away

Oh that is fantastic, that is so  
amazing  
Minkes are really supercool  
They just blow you away

# Supporting the Nautilus Scuba Club



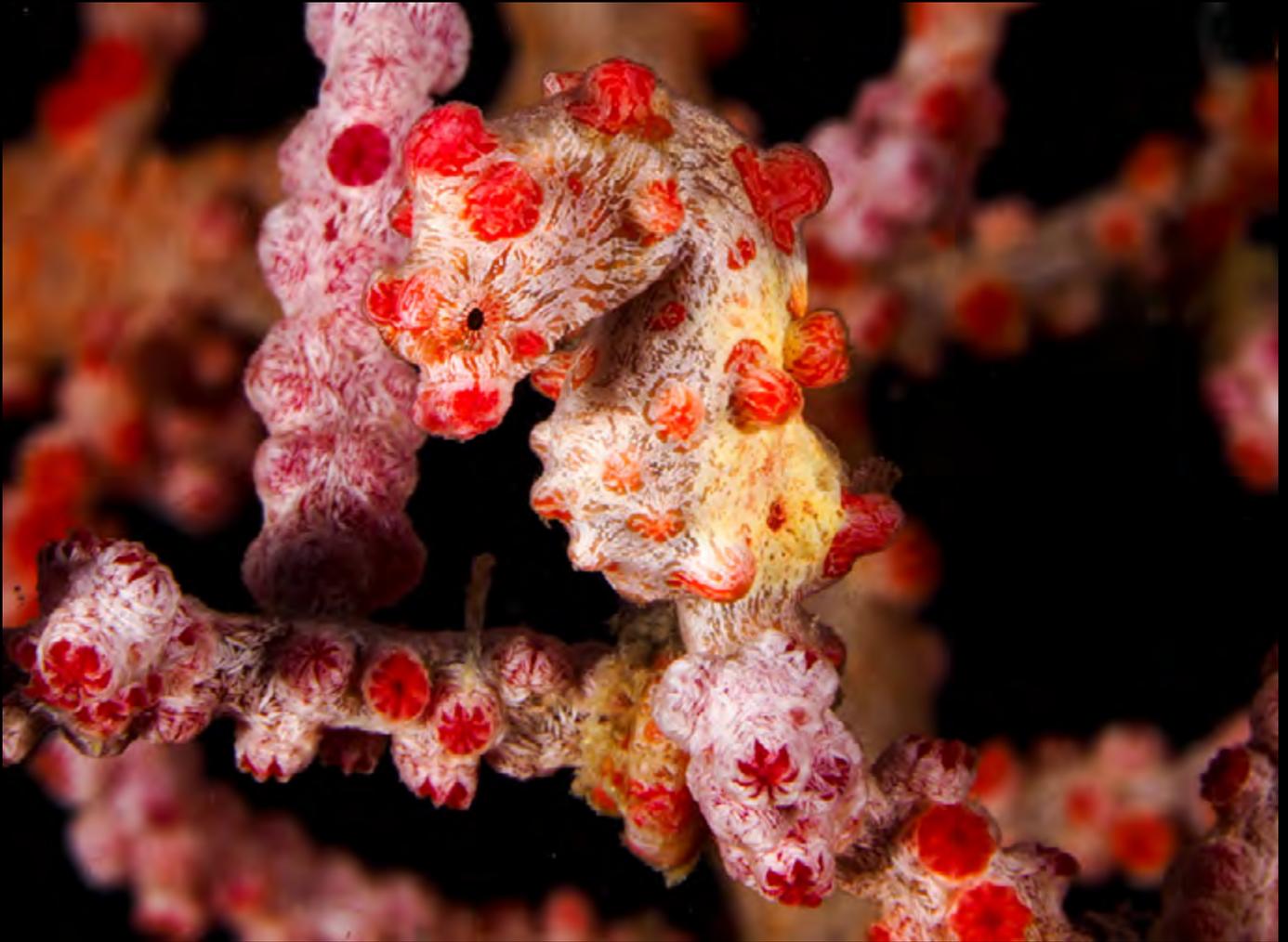
LISSENING ISLAND RESORT  
Kavieng • Papua New Guinea



DIVE • SNORKEL • SAIL



# PARTING SHOT



# PARTING SHOT

