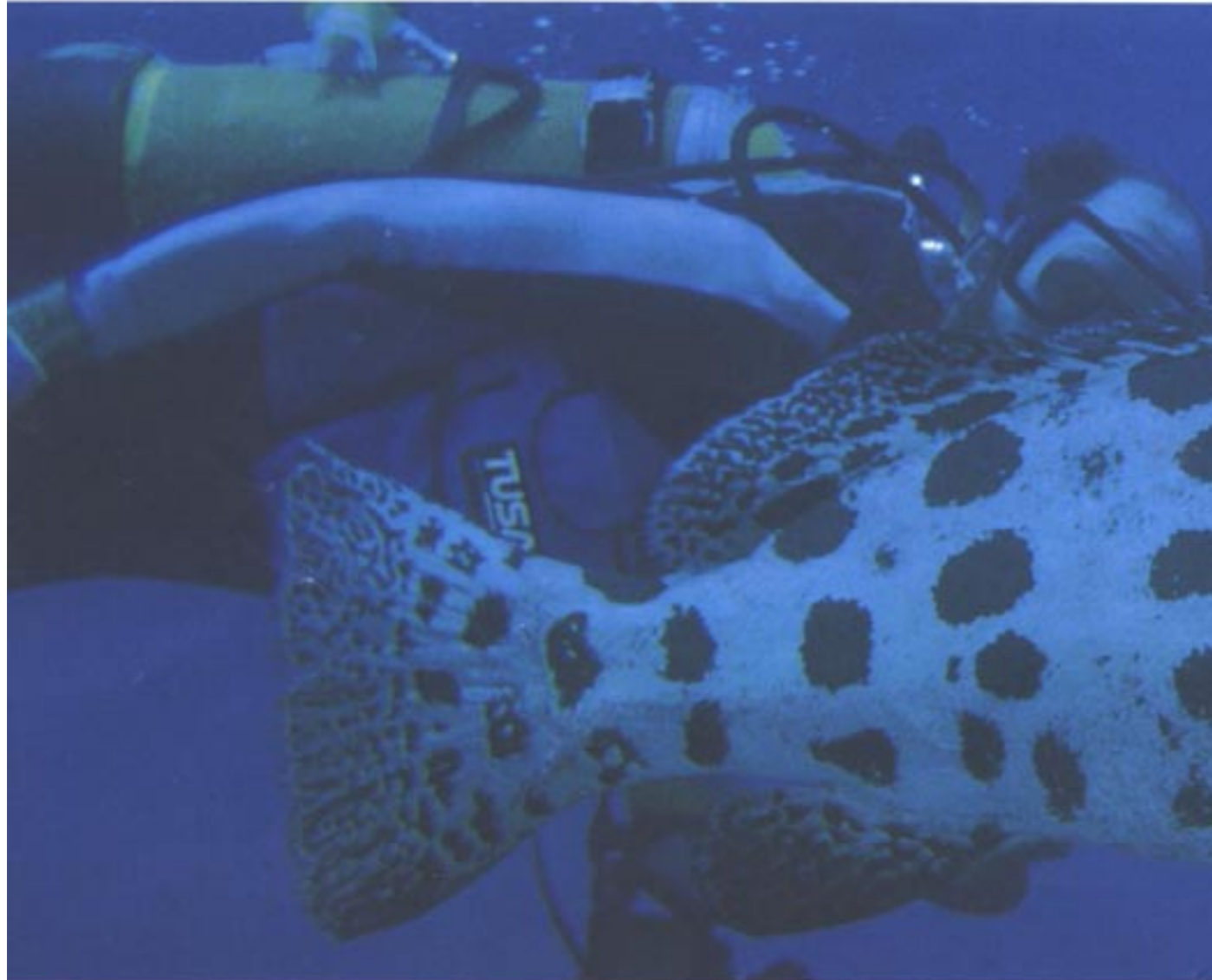


# GREAT

A U S T R A L I A



**L**IKE A BROKEN NECKLACE, THE GREAT BARRIER REEF LIES SCATTERED OFF THE COAST OF NORTH EASTERN AUSTRALIA PROTECTING THE QUEENSLAND COAST FROM THE POUNDING PACIFIC. TWO THOUSAND KILOMETRES LONG, STRETCHING FROM THE TROPIC OF CAPRICORN IN THE SOUTH TO THE TORRES STRAIT BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND NEW GUINEA IN THE NORTH, THE GREAT BARRIER REEF IS THE LARGEST LIVING STRUCTURE IN THE WORLD.

## CORALITA Live aboard diving

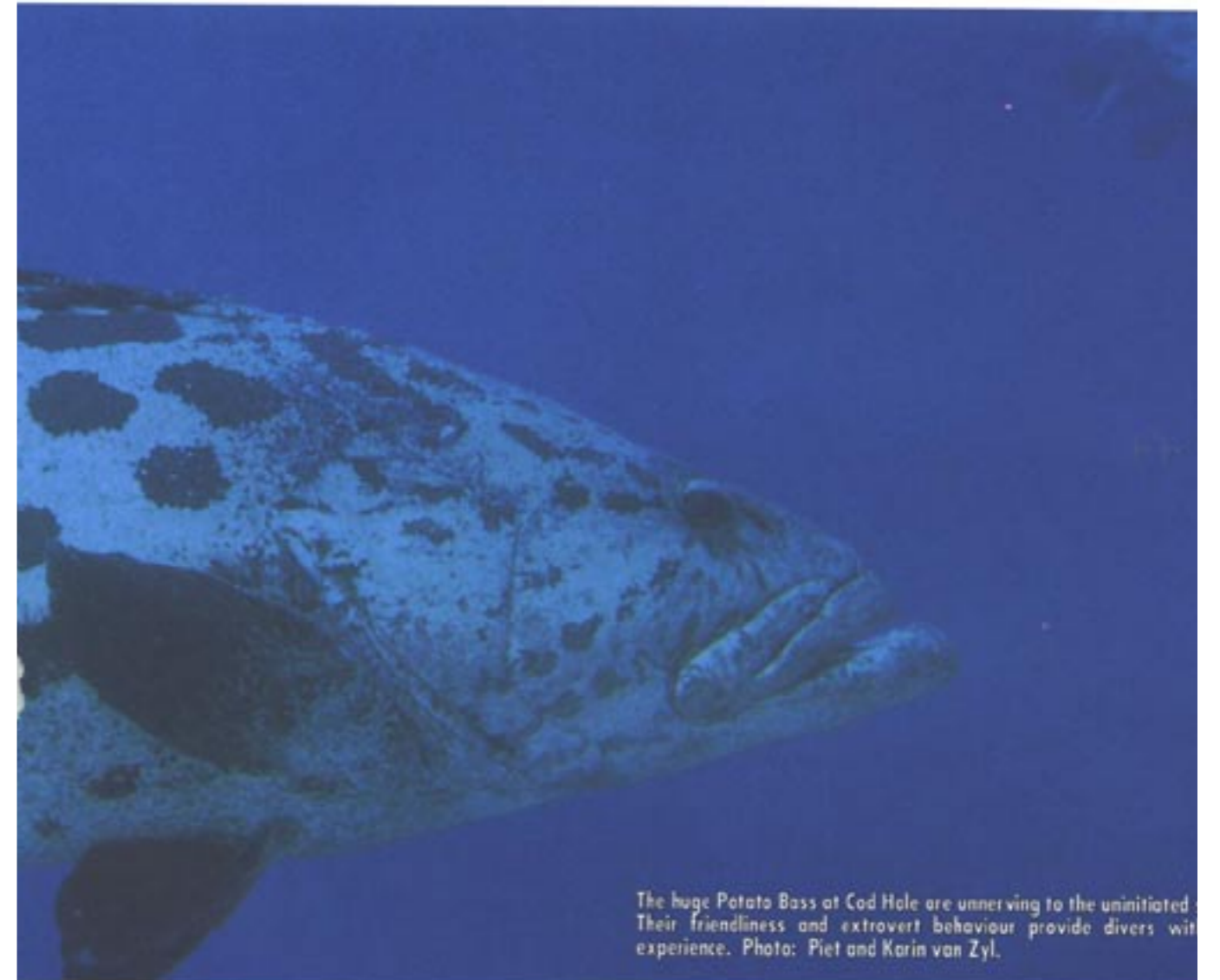
Contrary to popular belief, the shore diving off the Queensland coast is virtually non-existent as the reef itself, where the dive sites are to be found, is many kilometres off shore. Various options do, however, exist for the diver such as day trips, island resorts and live-aboard boats. Day trips are cheapest but are limited in scope. Sleek catamarans, leaving from Cairns, Townsville and Port Douglas to name a few, take snorkellers and divers to selected dive sites on the reef in a matter of a few hours. Helicopters manage the same trips in a

far shorter time but at a much cost. A choice of two hundred resorts cater for divers, snorkelers and wildlife enthusiasts. The resorts offer a variety of entertainment diving and snorkelling to reef and submersible trips. For the diver, live-aboards offer continuous diving and a wide selection of boats spend days visiting the coral cays and bommies of the reef they often venture further out into the wonders of the Coral Sea.

There are a number of live-aboards from which to choose to depart mainly from Port Douglas and Townsville. The "Coralita" is a popular choice. Owned by Alby Ziebell,

# WONDER

B A R R I E R R E E



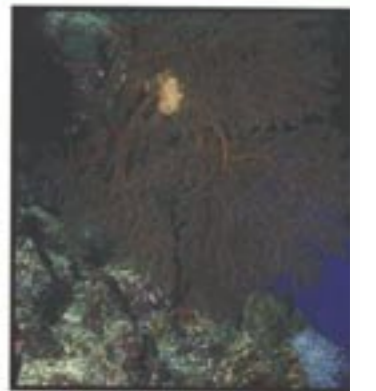
The huge Potato Bass at Cod Hole are unnering to the uninitiated. Their friendliness and extrovert behaviour provide divers with a unique experience. Photo: Piet and Karin van Zyl.

reputation as Australia's best dive adventure boat. Built by the Wright brothers in Brisbane, the Coralita is 23,6 metres long with a beam of seven metres and a cruise speed of eleven knots. She has a range of three thousand nautical miles and is fitted with modern navigational equipment. Six fully airconditioned cabins sleep two apiece. The crew consisted of Drew, the extremely competent skipper, Liane, the vivacious hostess, Craig, the irrepressible dive master and Mick, the impossibly slender creator of gargantuan, gastronomic feasts.

The Coralita departs from Cairns for the North Coral Sea trip for the best part of the year. From

September to December she leaves from Townsville for the South Coral Sea. September and October are the calmest months falling between the cyclone season and the trade winds. The schedule should be checked before booking.

Our trip took us north from Cairns. Our destination was flexible at that point as Cyclone Lisa prevented us from entering the heaving swells of the Coral Sea. We meandered along the reef, stopping here and there as the fancy took us: Norman Reef with white tipped reef sharks and a lone turtle, moving walls of fusiliers, elegant nudibranchs and giant Maori Wrasse; Opal Reef, a calm lagoon fringed by reef; Agincourt Reef with large game fish patrolling the vertical outer



Beautiful corals and brilliant colours: the scattered reefs of the Coral Sea. Photo: Piet and Karin van Zyl.



walls and tranquil coral gardens on the inside; 5 1/4 Ribbons Reef with giant clams like opened velvet purses; Pixie Pinnacle, famous for a world of small, exotic fish life; and perhaps most famous of all - Cod Hole.

○ Located in Cormorant Pass at the northern end of the Ribbons Reefs, Cod Hole is home to a family of approximately fifteen to twenty giant Potato Bass. Measuring at least one and a half metres in length the bass can be rather alarming as they glide in to greet divers enthusiastically. Confidently awaiting the usual gift of food, the fish are completely unafraid as they have been protected by the Australian Parliament since 1981.

○ Each trip on the Coralita is different. Prevailing conditions, divers inclinations, marine life activity are all taken into account when selecting the next dive site. The limited number of divers allows for spontaneity, as in our case, when we stopped to swim with a playful group of dolphins that were surfing the bow wave.

○ The furthest point north of our trip was Lizard Island, holiday hide-away of the rich and famous. Here we celebrated the sunset with a beach braai. At four in the morning an enormous, exquisitely marked manta ray tumbled and glided in a slow-motion display of aquatic acrobatics under our stem spotlight. In the silence of the pre-dawn, skimming like a shadow against the aquamarine sea, it was a fitting farewell from the Great Barrier Reef.

### COD HOLE Adventure diving on the Great Barrier Reef

It was with some trepidation that I launched myself off the back of the boat. Anchored at Cod Hole, on the great Barrier Reef aboard the live-aboard dive boat, the Coralita, we were about to embark on an orientation dive to acclimatize ourselves to the family of giant Potato Bass after whom Cod Hole is named. The purpose of the second dive would be to feed the family!



A live aboard such as the Coralita offers concentrated diving and a wide selection of locations for the serious diver. Photo: A. Handley.

○ I had been blithely unaware of the size of these fish until the pre-dive briefing which put alarming emphasis on the physical short-sightedness of the cod and their irritating habit of regarding any unguarded fingers and hands as appetizing little snacks. As scraps of squid were thrown overboard, the sea boiled with hungry Cod, unnerving me even more.

○ Once under the boat, sinking gently to the coral below, I realised why an orientation dive was recommended. Suspended all about us were thirteen cod, watching our gentle descent with interest. Divers are a well known source of food and we were greeted with enthusiasm. Huge mottled shapes glided up to us, close enough to hug and completely fearless. I concentrated on keeping my fingers to myself and tried to keep an eye on all thirteen odd fish. Impossible! I was soon spinning like a top with the effort.

○ Safely back on board, the divemaster informed us that the cod had been comparatively lethargic as we had taken no food down with us. He remarked gleefully that we would see a bit of action on the next dive.

○ Craig, the divemaster carried the food in a plastic container with a flap cut into one of the sides. As we approached the selected feeding site, the cod followed, their graceful gliding motion speeding up into swift turns and

darts. Craig took up position coral formation shaped like a The solid surface against his b prevent sneak attacks from b took up our various positi photographers jostling for the f the more cautious of us mai discreet distance.

○ As the food appe was an explosion of activity. cod twisted and writhed arc other in a frenzy, cracking thei tails with a sound like gunshot of smaller fish shimmered aroi eagerly snatching stray mors large moray eels curved sinu the fray, the larger one settlin Craig's legs as he crouched on A huge Napoleon Wrasse, e than the cod, loomed ominous blue and with lightening burst snatched food from Crai whenever the opportunity itself. One of the Morays, in a burst of enthusiasm, stuck his the food container and worrie terrier. All too soon the food w and the fish drifted away. W reluctantly, our minds still pr with the display we had wites

○ Cod Hole is loca North of the Great Barrier Cormorant Pass. The famil Potato Bass or Cod (E) Tukula) was discovered by Valerie Taylor in 1973. The nineteen that lived there at the hunted by boat skippers in C had learned of the location in Taylor's attempts to keep it s 1981 there were less than ten and Valerie Taylor led the preserve the remaining few an the Australian Parliament pu making Cormorant Pass a spec which spear and line fis prohibited.

○ Today the family approximately sixteen. That protective laws, the cod are st towards divers and Cod Hole to provide divers with a once-in diving adventure.

☐ G. HANDLEY

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### HOW TO GET THERE:

Qantas flies via Harare twice a week to Perth and Sydney. SAA flies to Singapore and Hong Kong. There are a number of carriers that fly to Australia from these destinations.

Qantas and SAA are expected to have direct flights to Australia early next year.

### TRAVEL/DIVE PACKAGES:

No dive packages are available for the South African diver. We recommend organizing a trip directly with the Australian travel agents. Gong Places is one of the most efficient. P.O. Box 490, Cairns, 4870, Queensland, Australia. Tel: (070) 514055, fax: (070) 314405.

The travel agent can tailor-make a package for the diver's needs.

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

South Africans require visas. These are now available through the Australian Embassy in Pretoria. They do not cost anything and take twenty-four hours to issue.

### TIME DIFFERENCE

West Coast + 6 hours SA time  
East Coast + 8 hours SA time

### OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

English

### CURRENCY

The currency is the Australian dollar.  
Denominations: 1c, 2c, 5c, 10c, 50c, \$1 & \$2 coins  
\$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100 notes.

### EXCHANGE RATE

0,4494 cents to the Rand (as at 29/11/91)

### ACCOMMODATION

Queensland has plenty of hostels and budget guest houses as well as mid range motels and holiday flats. Cairns tends to have a wide range of budget accommodation, Townsville has a fair range of all levels of accommodation while Port Douglas tends to be more expensive. Prices fluctuate due to competition and hostels change ownership regularly.

The travel agent can recommend a variety of

places to suit a budget or contact Queer Tourist and Travel Corporation Centre, 75 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, 2000. Tel: (02) 3315153

### DIVE OPERATIONS

Deep Sea Divers Den, 319 Draper Street, C (070) 512223 or fax: (070) 311210.  
Mike Ball Watersports, 252 Walker Street, To Queensland, tel: (077) 723022 or fax: (070) 3 Nimrod, 155 Sheridan Street, Cairns, Queensland, tel: (070) 311288 or fax: (070) 311373

### ADDITIONAL INFO

Tanks, weight belts and dive computers pr 3-5mm wetsuits recommended. Water temperatures range from 22 - 28 de with four dives a day, a little protection is v Queensland law requires five metre deco stops and a maximum of four dives per da Airport tax is twenty Australian dollars payd departure from Australia.