




# BY LAND AND BY SEA

*Do you love exploring underwater and topside on your dive vacation? Here are four liveaboard itineraries that pack both into a single week.*



 Some liveaboard destinations are designed to get you in the water and happily blowing bubbles as often as your dive computer will permit. And while you'll still have to find your land legs after a week of diving, these four liveaboards — *Four Seasons Explorer* in the Maldives, *M/V Chertan* in Papua New Guinea's Milne Bay, *Sun Dancer II* in Belize, and *Galapagos Aggressor III* — offer land-based excursions that are as much fun as the diving. In fact, the topside and underwater experiences combine to make these among the most memorable dive vacations you'll ever have.

TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: CHRISTIAN LOADER/SCUBAZOO; TANYA G. BURNETT (3); BRANDON COLE (2); COURTESY FOUR SEASONS EXPLORER; BRANDON COLE (2)



# DIVING WITH THE COOL KIDS

*Adrenaline-pumping adventures can be found in, around and outside Belize's iconic Blue Hole*

BY  
TARA  
BRADLEY



**CLOCKWISE:** Belize's famous Blue Hole; Atlantic nurse sharks peruse the waters; a giant Caribbean anemone dances in the current.

Our all-inclusive dive menu doesn't start with the famous Blue Hole, but rather with the obscurely named Site Y. My boyfriend and I are stoked as we learn from the dive briefing that the wall starts shallow — which in diver-speak means we get more bottom time. As we descend, we spot the shadows of two blacktip reef sharks. Upon approach, they tail us like a pair of friendly grouper. One comes in tight to my lens, where I'm granted great close-up shots accompanied by my own

heart-thumping theme song. And while I play it cool, I'm starting to think these guys are hanging around a little too long. But in the ocean, they are the cool kids. It doesn't take much time for them to grow bored with us and move on to find something more exciting. As for me, it's only the first day and I couldn't be more in awe.

The seven-day trip of our all-you-can eat, sleep and dive extravaganza is aboard Aggressor and Dancer Fleet's *Sun Dancer II*. And they don't skimp on the

service: The only thing we have to do is jump in and dive. (They even provide valet fin service.) Surface intervals are diver's choice: eating fresh-baked banana bread, reading on the deck or, my favorite, taking a nap.

Averaging four to five dives a day (night dives included), our trip is bookended with a dive at Sandy Slope. Our finale seems almost orchestrated: a bold green moray eel, curious grouper, a gliding spotted eagle ray and a perfectly poised pink seahorse. As we head to the hang bar for our safety stop, a cloud of horse-eye jacks circles under the 138-foot boat. My camera can take only so much excitement.

When we surface, I'm thankful for the last juice left in my batteries, then we hear the screams: "Dolphins!"

The divers who have already surfaced are now snorkeling with a pod of 12 dolphins. Dumping our gear on the dive platform, we join them. I resist the urge to swim back to the boat for fresh batteries — it's not every day your dive ends with an impromptu dolphin swim.

While that might be a tough act to follow, Belize doesn't disappoint when it comes to land adventures either. The natural beauty of its waters is mirrored by the wild freedom of its jungles — and it's the perfect place to get your land legs back in gear.



## THE BOAT

### *Sun Dancer II*

Total passengers: 20 // Cabins: 10 // Total crew: 7  
// Length: 138 feet // Number of decks: 3

Places like Maruba Resort Jungle Spa, 45 minutes outside Belize City, offer excursions that range from mud massages and Mayan-ruin tours to zip-lining through the canopy and tubing through the rainforest. We opt for the latter but decide to throw a horse into the mix; before long I am breathless on the back of a galloping mare on the fastest jungle tour one can experience outside of a zip-line. We stop occasionally in search of a

toucan or howler monkey. There's even talk of a prowling jaguar. It's only when we are in full throttle heading back to the property that I realize I could easily fall off. Playing it cool, I hold on a little tighter, but I know I haven't fooled anyone. From the jaguars to the black-tips, there's no need to try and play it cool here. These guys have it covered. And it sure is impressive watching them do it. [aggressor.com](http://aggressor.com)