

PERFECT PIERS AND DYNAMIC DRAGONS

: BRUCE POTTER

> WHEN MY WIFE AND I LEFT THE SOLOMON ISLANDS AFTER 15 YEARS AND ACCEPTED JOBS IN THE DESERT IN THE VERY CENTRE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, I THOUGHT WE'D BE LEAVING GOOD DIVING BEHIND FOR A WHILE. THEN I DID A FEW DIVES AROUND PERTH, ALBANY, AND EXMOUTH, AND DISCOVERED SOME OF THE BEST TEMPERATE DIVING I'VE EVER DONE.

As soon as I had Western Australia in mind, my thoughts turned to leafy seadragons, and the Busselton Jetty. I was not disappointed. So much has already been written about the Busselton Jetty that there's little I can add, other than to say it is an absolute must dive. The abundant macro life around the jetty makes it a photographer's paradise. From the masses of nudibranchs to the encrusted pylons and multitude of fish, it is a dive that you can do over and over without ever becoming tired of it. Plus it's an excellent night dive. This is a very easy shallow dive; you can do it without exceeding eight or nine metres.

You can walk to the end of the jetty and jump in, but I don't recommend this – it's a two kilometre walk and remember you'll have to walk back after your dive. It's much smarter to contact The Dive Shed and speak with Julie or Peter. They'll take you there by boat, and they are great fun. Contact www.diveshed.com.au

And after you've done your dives, it really is worth visiting the underwater observatory at the end of the jetty. We went back several times and found late afternoon to be the best time to visit at this time of day the light is at its most artistic and the visitors are few.

North of Busselton is Rockingham. On the southern side of town are a couple of small jetties which are well worth a look. They abound in seahorses, nudibranchs, crabs and other odd critters. These are very easy and shallow shore dives.

But there's another jetty dive that surpasses even Busselton Jetty, and it's the Navy Pier at Exmouth. For many years it wasn't possible to dive it, as the Navy kept it locked away. But in 2007 it was opened up to the public under strictly controlled conditions. Just one dive company has been given permission by the Navy to be official controllers of this site. Once again it is nudibranch heaven,



Left: *Chromodoris africana*

- 1 Pink & yellow seahorse
- 2 Shaws cowfish
- 3 *Nembrotha kubariana*
- 4 *Mexichromis macropus*
- 5 Olive sea snake
- 6 Weedy sea dragon
- 7 *Chromodoris roboi*
- 8 Port Jackson shark
- 9 *Ceratosoma amoena*
- 10 White barred box fish
- 11 Leafy sea dragon
- 12 Porcupine fish
- 13 *Chromodoris westraliensis*
- 14 *Ceratosoma brevicaudatum*

1	3	5	8	11
			9	12 13
2	4	6	7	10 14

with heaps of other sealife thrown in, including olive sea snakes, octopus and cuttlefish, seahorses, angel and butterfly fish, and most interestingly, a school of grey nurse sharks.

As you drift around among the pylons, it is just magical to run into a large grey nurse drifting the other way. This is a very 'atmospheric' dive, and just being in the water under this jetty is an almost mystical experience. It is claimed to be one of the top 10 shore dives in the world. I'll certainly be returning. Entering or exiting from the beach during a strong current can be tricky, otherwise it is an easy dive. To dive the Navy Pier contact Ningaloo Dreaming at www.ningaloodreaming.com

In search of leafy seadragons we headed south to Albany where I was practically guaranteed weedy seadragons, but leafies aren't seen so often. However an operator in Bremer Bay offered me a

much stronger likelihood of seeing leafies, so one day, racing ahead of some bad weather, we rushed from Albany across to Bremer Bay where Craig Lebens of Bremer Bay Dive took me in search of a leafy seadragon. The dive was shallow, no deeper than 12 metres, and followed the shoreline around the bay. It was sand and weed all the way. We found some weedies and two leafies, one carrying eggs. This was a very easy and extremely rewarding dive. Craig is one of the country's foremost experts on seadragons. Contact Craig on www.bremerbaydive.com

Back in Albany, Ewe (pronounced 'Oover') took us to several sites, where we saw sealions at play, and ship wrecks. On one dive you can start on the wreck *Cheyne 3*, and then move across to a kelp-covered rock wall and see half a dozen weedy seadragons per dive. I did manage to find one leafy there, but not

everyone does. Contact Ewe at www.divealbany.com.au

We're now living in Fiji where the diving around the coast of Viti Levu is quite disappointing, and the resorts are a bit expensive for casual visiting. I find I'm hankering for the cooler water and fantastic dive sites of southern Western Australia. I'll definitely return for more!

> LINK: www.westernaustralia.com



WESTERN AUSTRALIA

