

> MANY DIVERS EXPERIENCED TONY AND DOT MEDCRAFT'S EXMOUTH-BASED OPERATION IN NORTHERN WESTERN AUSTRALIA – THEY TOOK MULTITUDES OF US OUT TO SEE THOSE INCREDIBLE WHALE SHARKS. THEY EVENTUALLY MOVED TO BALI INTENDING TO RETIRE BUT DIVERS FOLLOWED THEM RELENTLESSLY. TULAMBEN WRECK DIVERS WAS BORN – DOT AND TONY BEGAN DELIVERING TOTALLY DIFFERENT WORLD-CLASS CREATURE EXPERIENCES.

Main The USAT Liberty was a WWII troop ship torpedoed by the Japanese and run aground at Tulamben on 11 January 1942. Some 21 years later tremors from a volcanic eruption at nearby Mt Agung shook the wreck into the ocean. Now this 120 metre long vessel hosts a huge number of fish and critters, and is one of the most accessible wrecks in the world. Lisa's mantis shrimp is one of the 'grabbing' type. They live in holes, poking their head up in hope of a passing fish. They're quite large, strong bulldozer-like crustaceans that seem curious about passing bubble-blowing mammals. Not dangerous in the general scheme of things, but I'm not game to get my fingers too close!

Tony, Dot and Wayan run Tulamben Wreck Divers.

Photo courtesy Jeff Mullins.

Bottom: The penthouse with barbecue



Australian Ken Hoppen caught up with Tony Medcraft for Sportdiving magazine:

KH: What brought you both to Bali?

TM: Tulamben was our holiday destination for many years. We started travelling here in about 1989 when we were in Exmouth – it was our place to get away from work, have a holiday with superb diving, and relax on the beachfront.

KH: Why settle in Tulamben?

TM: When we sold Exmouth Dive Centre we missed the diving and meeting new people so we considered opening up another dive centre, and began looking at different locations in Indonesia. We just kept coming back to Bali and Tulamben. No boat problems, no internal flight problems, and the quality of the diving here was hard to beat. It took two years searching before we decided on the location we'd been coming to for many years. Within four hours of stepping off the plane you can be diving, and that includes coming through customs and the two and a half hour drive up the coast.

KH: Your facility caters beautifully for your customers. Did you build it yourself?

TM: Yes, we built the shop in 2000, then the rooms out the back, dug the pool, and on it went. When the bombs went off, we were building the accommodation, pouring cement foundations. It was a worrying time for all, but we just had to go on as if every day would be better than the last, and it was. Being a fair distance from Kuta and

Legian, this place has a totally different atmosphere. It's very relaxed and geared towards diving.

KH: The extras you provide here make a diving holiday so easy! Being picked up at the airport, the quality of the rooms and beach villas deliver a seamless experience. The diving here is fantastic, the diversity of life is just amazing. Do you have a favourite dive site?

TM: Every dive is worth a dive, I don't think I've ever had a bad one; I'm a diving junkie. Mystery Rock is brilliant when the conditions are right; whitetip reef sharks, lots of rays, nudibranchs, masses of fish life, soft corals – its such a large site you need to do three or four dives to see it. The Liberty Wreck and Seraya are always brilliant. I've done thousands of dives at these sites and still consistently see new creatures or behaviours. You need to slow down and look at things. As I'm becoming more short-sighted, Dot and I are looking at things differently, slowing down and seeing new things we'd have passed over before. We've started using magnifying glasses – that has opened up a new smaller world we've overlooked before. You don't need to swim massive distances here to find new critters!

KH: Any unusual encounters?

TM: We have about 15 days or so a year where we have sunfish on the wreck; they hang into the current, and if they're not disturbed and pushed out by divers moving too close they'll hang around for ages. You just never know here, the

SEA

CHANGE

KEN HOPPEN