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ADVENTURES MAGAZINE

**Port Hardy
Between Civilization and Wilderness**

**Alabama Sinks into the
Future of Marine Conservation**

Under the Boardwalk



**Slow, Lumbering, and a Row of Gnarly Teeth
Meet the Sand Tiger Shark**

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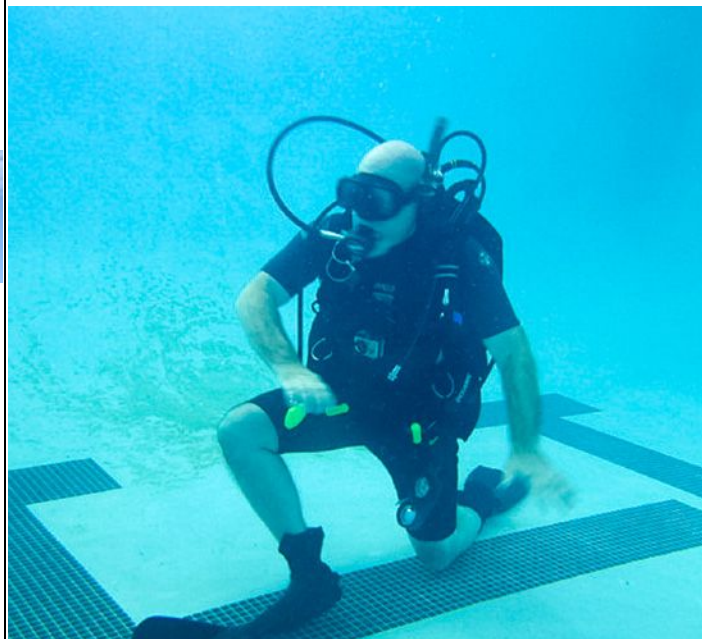
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ABOUT THE COVER:
Citizen scientists can follow their sharks, as well as other sighted sharks, over time.
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Under the Boardwalk: Diving St. Croix's Frederiksted Pier

Article and Photos by Michael Salvarezza & Christopher P. Weaver

Standing at the edge of the pier, with the tropical sun beating down on us as we stood fully kitted in our dive gear ready to step into the water, the famous chords of the old Drifter's song "Under the Boardwalk" seemed to be locked into our brains.

Under the Boardwalk, Out of the sun

Under the Boardwalk, We'll be havin' some fun

Under the Boardwalk, We'll be fallin' in love



Under the Boardwalk, People walkin' above

Under the Boardwalk,

Under the boardwalk, boardwalk



A Caribbean Reef Shark patrols the reef at Cane Bay

It was too enticing to wait any longer and so we took a giant stride step off the side of St. Croix's Frederiksted Pier and splashed into 15 feet of warm, clear Caribbean water. After a brief moment on the surface to clear masks, adjust cameras and check the rest of our gear, it was time to dive.

We swam a brief distance along a fairly nondescript bulkhead until we reached the first set of pilings... and our hearts nearly stopped in awe. There, shimmering in perfect unison in and around the coral and sponge-encrusted pilings was an enormous baitball of Scad. The school of innumerable fish twisted and turned, morphing into myriad shapes and formations like an ever-changing

underwater Rorschach test!

And then we spied the source of the baitball's fear: several three-foot-long Tarpon, the large scales on their sides glinting in the sun and their black eyes intently sizing up the school of fish, were swimming beneath them. They would circle and then strike, moving into the ball and emerging with one of the hapless fish. The Scad were mistaken in their perceived safety beneath the pier...the real danger came from below!

We watched transfixed as this simple but merciless act of nature played out before us. And we were crestfallen as we realized our cameras were set up to shoot macro subjects beneath this man-made universe of marine

creatures! We would have to return another day with different lenses and hope the baitball survived!

The Frederiksted Pier is a 1,526-foot-long deep-water cruise ship pier located at the Ann E. Abramson marine Facility in the town of Frederiksted on the west side of St. Croix. Although cruise ships are somewhat infrequent, the pier can accommodate vessels weighing up to 142,000 gross tons with drafts up to 29 feet. Within walking distance of the pier is the town's shopping area, with museums and restaurants available for visitors to St. Croix. When the cruise ships do put into port here, taxis and buses are readily available for tours to other parts of the island. The pier and the sleepy town jump

to life at these times. But when the ships are not here, the pier is quiet, the town is refreshingly empty and the underwater world of Frederiksted Pier beckons divers to explore.

We had planned two dives on this day, starting with a late afternoon plunge followed by a night dive to capture the weird and wonderful nocturnal creatures of St. Croix. Shortly after turning our attention away from the baitball, we encountered a shy seahorse peeking out from behind a small tube sponge. The pilings are adorned with colorful corals, sponges, hydroids, gorgonians and other sedentary organisms. Christmas Tree worms abound, as do feather-dusters, and photographers can spend entire dives on one single piling captivated by a seemingly endless bounty of subjects.

Moving along, we came across a small purple-tipped anemone and as we looked more closely we spotted a community of Squat Anemone Shrimp standing guard among the tentacles. We even photographed a Spotted Cleaner Shrimp, its translucent body punctuated by day-glow purple and pink splotches.

Our first dive whet our appetites for the transformation into night, and our second dive began just as the sun was setting to the west. Immediately, we sensed a new dynamic beneath the pier. Many of the reef fish were tucked into nooks, crannies and crevices and were beginning a night of sleep while other creatures were just emerging for the night. A small octopus caught our attention, as did an Ocellate Swimming Crab scurrying along the bottom. We photographed the weirdly shaped Arrow Crab and came across a pair of Banded Coral Shrimp, one with the greenish clutch of eggs easily visible in her translucent belly.

The supposed silent world of the ocean was anything but quiet as we tuned our ears to the snapping of popping of shrimp and other crustaceans. And, as we encountered the baitball again towards our exit, we could hear the rush of fish through the water as they twisted and turned into the night.

Diving the Frederiksted Pier is an easy endeavor, but its beauty and grandeur should not be underestimated. Navigation is simple (just follow the pilings) and there is often little to no current. Divers rarely reach water deeper than 25 feet and there is no reason to try to swim to the very end of the pier as the marine subjects along the way will steal your attention.

The Frederiksted Pier is reason alone for divers to venture to St. Croix, but there are other dive sites worth exploring as well. The Davis Bay Wall on the north side of St. Croix is only a few hundred yards offshore and is within swimming distance from the shore. Here, divers find a dramatic coral reef that starts at around 30 feet and tumbles into thousands of feet of water. Swimming along the wall, we kept one eye focused on the blue water and spotted Caribbean Reef Sharks patrolling the reef in the deeper water along with Spotted Eagle Rays and a lone Amberjack.

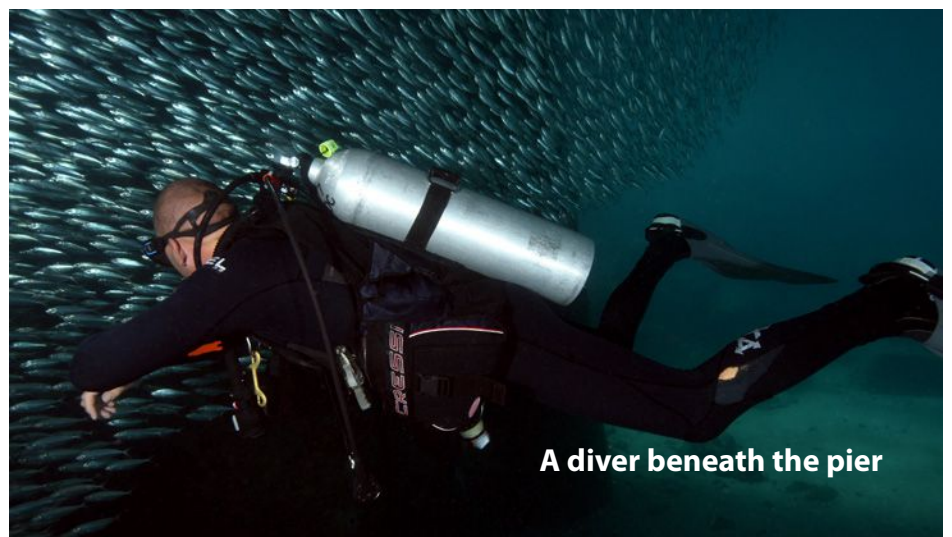
Nearby is Cane Bay, which is home to more reefs and walls and healthy populations of typical Caribbean Reef life. It, too, is accessible as a shore dive. As with any shore dive, pay attention to wave conditions. Usually mild, the northern exposure can bring large waves on occasion that divers must respect during entries and exits. At Cane Bay we enjoyed seeing sea turtles, southern rays and healthy populations of reef fish.

On St. Croix, there is a rich history embedded into a thriving and proud



community of residents. Touring the island, you are able to walk through Forts used during various time periods of St. Croix's history, the remains of old sugar mills and plantations and hike to an abandoned lighthouse built by the Danish government before the island was sold to the United States in 1917.

But for divers, the star attraction is the Frederiksted Pier. Hurricane

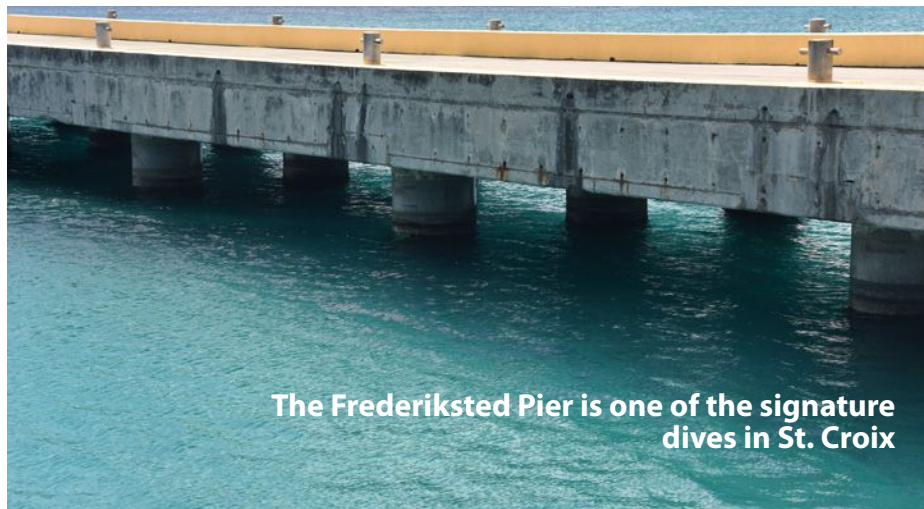


A diver beneath the pier

Hugo destroyed the original pier in 1989. Construction of the new pier used some of the remains of the old pier as landfill for its platform, but most of the remnants of the old pier were removed and sunk in 110 feet of water about two miles away. And in just a few decades, the new pier has quickly become overgrown with marine life creating a healthy marine habitat for divers to enjoy.

On September 19, 2017 Hurricane Maria dealt a vicious blow to the US Virgin Islands, including St. Croix. With winds reaching 157 MPH, there was significant damage inflicted to the island: downed trees, damaged homes, loss of electricity and shortages of supplies were most common in the days immediately following the storm. However, the island is recovering nicely. Although two prominent resorts remain closed (The Renaissance and the Divi), most of the rest of the island is back up and running. Additionally, the Frederiksted Pier survived the onslaught of the fierce storm and emerged unscathed. Now is the time to journey to St. Croix to dive the pier, support the island's recovering economy and enjoy the beauty of one of the jewels of the Caribbean.

We surfaced from our night dive and gazed at the canopy of stars above. Our minds, and our camera's memory cards, were full of images of the wonders we found below the pier. We knew we'd be back to try to capture the baitball with wide angle lenses, but for now we floated on our backs, enjoying the silence of the



The Frederiksted Pier is one of the signature dives in St. Croix

night and wistfully watching the trail of bioluminescence trailing our fins as we pushed slowly towards our exit point. It was time to say good night to the Frederiksted Pier.

Getting There:

St. Croix is part of the United States Virgin Islands. Several air carriers service the island through Miami, Atlanta and Charlotte, North Carolina, as well as Puerto Rico.

Immunizations and Medicine:

As with any travel to tropical regions, make sure all your vaccinations are up to date! All travelers should visit their personal physician or a travel health clinic to discuss what vaccinations (e.g., Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Malaria, Typhoid, or Tetanus-diphtheria) and travel medicine are recommended. All medicine should be packed in their original, clearly labeled containers. Having a signed and dated letter from a physician

describing your medical conditions and medications is suggested.

Zika Virus is an emerging health hazard throughout many islands in the Caribbean, including St. Croix. Travelers should take appropriate mosquito precautions including the wearing of long pants and long-sleeved shirts, and the use of insect repellent.

Note: Travel health clinics usually provide more detailed health protection measures since they specialize in travel medicine. Beware of travelers' diarrhea, which is the most common travel-related ailment. Insect protection is a must and essential!

Baggage: Baggage allowances vary for each international carrier so check before you leave.

Weather: St. Croix enjoys a tropical environment, with the warmer temperatures (86-89 degrees Fahrenheit) in the summer months



of May-November and the cooler temperatures (82-84 degrees Fahrenheit) in the winter months of December-April. Hurricanes are a threat during the hurricane season, which runs from June through November.

Electricity: The voltage on St. Croix is 100 volts.

Currency: The local currency is the US Dollar.

Rental Cars: On St. Croix it is recommended to rent a car. Driving is done on the left side of the road. Taxis are expensive and local regulations prevent dive operators from providing transport to various shore diving sites, so a rental car is the best option.



A baitball under the Frederiksted Pier

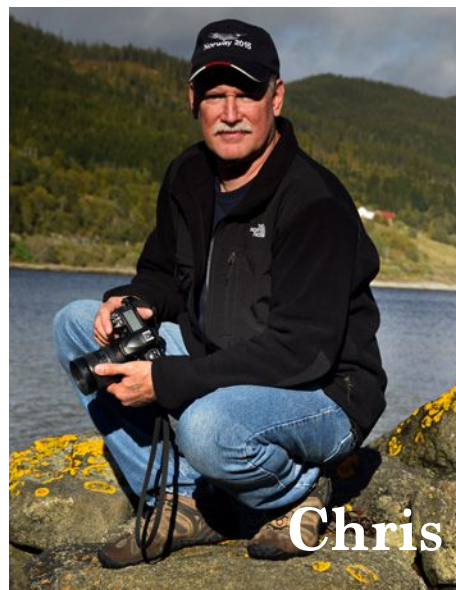
About Eco-Photo Explorers: Michael Salvarezza & Christopher P. Weaver

Michael Salvarezza and Christopher Weaver have been diving the waters the world since 1978. In that time, they have spent thousands of hours underwater and have accumulated a large and varied library of photographic images. They have presented their work in many multi-media slide presentations, and have appeared previously at Beneath the Sea, the Boston Sea Rovers Underwater Clinic, Ohio ScubaFest and Our World Underwater. Mike and Chris have been published more than 125 articles in numerous magazines, including National Geographic Adventure, and have authored numerous articles for the majority of the dive publications the world over. Their work has also been used to support a number of research and educational programs, including the Jason Project for Education, the Atlantis Marine World Aquarium in New York, The New York Harbor School Billion Oyster Project, The Northeast Ocean Planning Recreation Survey and the Cambridge University and the University of Groningen Arctic Centre work on monitoring the transformation of historic features in Antarctica and Svalbard. Mike and Chris are the Executive Producers of the annual Long Island Divers Association (LIDA) Film Festival.

Eco-Photo Explorers (EPE) is a New York based organization and was formed in 1994 to help promote interest in protecting the environment through knowledge and awareness through the use of underwater photography.

Photography, multimedia slide presentations, lectures and freelance writing are all used to accomplish this goal. Christopher Weaver and Michael Salvarezza make up Eco-Photo Explorers. Both live in New York on Long Island and have been scuba diving together since 1978, but didn't seriously start photographing the ocean realm until 1989. Since then, they have spent thousands of hours underwater accumulating and putting together a large and varied library of high-resolution stock photography from around the world. They specialize in all aspects of underwater still photography (wide angle and macro), nature photography, magazine and technical writing and have produced many multimedia slide programs that are designed to educate as well as enlighten the public about the marine environment and the various threats that exist to destroy it.

www.ecophotoexplorers.com



Chris



Mike