**EXOTIC DIVE-ISLAND CUSTOMS**

*Topside color can rival what you see underwater*

**By Travis Marshall**

The reefs of the world’s tropical islands are loaded with colorful creatures and exotic sights, but don’t miss out on colorful local customs happening topside. Here are five of our favorite experiences from dive spots around the world.

**TEMELCEL ON THE RIVIERA MAYA**

On the Riviera Maya, many resorts and spas are keeping alive the ancient temecal tradition. Aztecs and Maya used domed sweat lodge-style steam huts as a form of meditation and healing. You too can experience the ritual steam bath, scented with indig- enous herbs, as the perfect way to wind down from a week’s dive vacation — just be warned: It’s hot in there.

**CREMATION CEREMONIES OF BALI**

In contention as the most elaborate and exuberant display of any dive island are the joyous cremation cere- monies of Bali. Open to all and inclusive of food, music and offerings, the events happen at Trinidad’s Carnival. Dance is a coming-of-age experience. The Baining Fire Dance is a far more ancient historic tradition. Aztecs crafted masks while dancing around — and upon — a blazing fire, occasionally kicking showers of red coals among the onlookers.

**KAVA IN FIJI**

An integral part of any village visit in Fiji is the communal kava ceremony. The mildly narcotic root is ground and steeped into a tea before rasconal hukus bowls are passed around the circle. You might be asked if you prefer high tide (full cup) or low tide (half cup). When a bowl is proffered, first clap and yell “bula” before drawing it in one gulp, then clap three times when you’re done.

**TAG AND RELEASE**

Students at the University of Miami track shark migratory patterns

**By Amanda Morales**

Scientists are getting closer to revealing the secret lives of sharks.

An ongoing project at the R.J. Dunlap Marine Conservation Program at the University of Miami is utilizing a custom satellite-tagging network to track sharks and their travels in the Atlantic Ocean. On a typical outing, RJD scientists and students tag an average of three to five sharks. Media and virtual-learning manager for RJD, Christine Shepard, has joined researchers on numerous trips.

“We catch a variety of shark species, such as nurse, great hammerhead, lemon, blacktip, bull, tiger, and many more,” says Shepard.

Sharks are caught and released using methods intended to inflict minimal stress and harm.

“All the research meth- ods we use are designed to promote health and survi- vorship in the sharks, while also gathering vital data to improve conservation manage- ment,” says Shepard.

The satellite tag records the shark’s location, as well as conditions surrounding the animal. Every time the shark surfaces, the satellite tag transmits data on water temperature and the depth, at which it is swimming.

“I feel very fortunate to be working on a team with incredibly passionate and in- novative marine scientists,” says Shepard. “Our work is aimed to not only further the science behind marine-conserva- tion policy, but also to improve scientific literacy and marine conservation ethics.”

You can sponsor individu- al satellite tags, and track the sharks using Google Maps.

勳 To follow the sharks, visit sharktagging.com.

**FOR DIVERS AND SNORKELERS ALIKE**

Big Pine Key & Florida’s Lower Keys is music to their ears. Because with famed Loos Key Reef, home to 150 species of fish and more than 50 varieties of coral, and wrecks such as the perfectly upright 210’ Freighter Adolphus Busch, Big Pine Key & Florida’s Lower Keys really is the perfect dive combo.

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