

With Richard Branson. Curtis Martin. Roy Firestone. Jessica Cauffiel.

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Every summer, grown men attempt to recapture their youth by attending fantasy baseball or basketball camps.

While there, they meet their boyhood idols and "compete" with them in an attempt to fulfill lifelong dreams. While I was always athletically minded, my fondest G-rated boyhood fantasy didn't involve sports at all. Instead, my vision featured daring underwater adventure, narrow escapes, breathtakingly beautiful women and of course, saving the world. I dreamed of being just like Sean Connery – the pre-eminent James Bond.

In fact, the classic Bond film "Thunderball," with its spectacular underwater stunts and action, helped spark my interest in the underwater world. Today, I'm an avid scuba diver and I have James Bond to thank. During a recent trip to the Bahamas, I was able to create my own fantasy escape. It started with my arrival at the newly renovated Hilton Colonial in Nassau; the same hotel featured in "Thunderball" and "Never Say Never Again."

I was treated with all the respect due a British super-spy and taken to their special James Bond suite. A few minutes later, there was a knock on the door and a porter brought in a martini–shaken, not stirred, naturally. As I sat down to relax, I noticed the entire Bond film collection was there for my viewing pleasure. What a perfect way to get me in the mood for the next day's activities.

The next morning, I met up with Stuart Cove, owner of Dive Bahamas. I was invited on a private guided dive on the famous Vulcan Bomber, a massive structure that was sunk specifically for the underwater scenes in "Thunderball" back in the mid-'60s. Stuart and

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his team take adventurous divers on guided tours of the James Bond wrecks every day.

But this particular day was going to be mine. My opportunity to be just like 007. My opportunity to explore sunken wrecks. Perhaps have a chance encounter with a shark or two. It may have been stretching things to hope for a tall blond to accompany me—or would it?

Cove knows the Bond wrecks and the local waters exceptionally well, having worked as a shark wrangler on "For Your Eyes Only" and "Never Say Never Again" (Connery's last Bond film). He must have read my mind because he arranged for Claudia, a 5'10" South

African beauty, to be my dive buddy for these fantasy dives. Claudia, a striking blonde who could easily have been cast in a Bond film herself, works for Dive Bahamas as an underwater photographer and dive guide.

Little encouragement was needed as we geared up and then dropped over the side of the boat and descended into the crystal blue water toward the massive structure.

The years have taken their toll on the lady, but you could still make out the framing where Connery had battled sharks and the bad guys. The fabulous structure is now covered with plenty of colorful corals and the wreck is home to a multitude of sea creatures. I couldn't help but grin. Here I was on the same dive site as the world's greatest and most suave superagent! I couldn't wait to get home to tell my buddies.

As if that wasn't enough, things got better on the next dive. Claudia broke out a bright yellow DPV (dive propulsion vehicle). It looked like a cross between something from "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and a Jacques Cousteau special. As we made our way

toward the bottom, it didn't take much effort to imagine myself alongside Sean Connery in the famous underwater action scenes in "Thunderball." Claudia pointed toward another underwater structure and off we went.

“My fantasy would not have been complete without at least one dive with the sharks.”

The DPVs enabled us to travel underwater at up to two knots. The low hum of the engine and the ability to move about effortlessly through the water was something I had only seen on TV. Now I was "wall-flying" myself and it was magnificent.

The underwater photographer who accompanied us on the dive would get plenty of photos, especially the wide grin that was permanently etched on my face as we continued the dive.

The second wreck looked vaguely familiar, but it wasn't until we finished the dive that Claudia explained that the wreck, *Tears of Allah*, was a boat intentionally sunk for the filming of "Never Say Never Again" in the early '80s. She explained that this was where Connery did his memorable scenes with several large sharks in an underwater sequence with Barbara Carrera.

While we did not encounter any sharks while diving the Bond wrecks, my fantasy trip would not have been complete without at least one dive with the sharks. And the dive masters were happy to accommodate by allowing me to observe a shark feeding at a site called the Runway. The surprisingly docile Caribbean reef sharks we encountered swarmed all around us looking for the bait box. The sharks are just looking for a free meal and I'm told they rarely bite the hand that feeds them. But just in case, our feeder wore steel gloves.

I don't know many people who are able to live out their wildest childhood fantasies. In the span of three days, I had logged dives on two wrecks broken in by Sean Connery himself, cruised the reefs like Jacques Cousteau with a lovely "mermaid" at my side, and felt the adrenaline rush of having 20 hungry sharks swarming within a few feet of me.

While I'm uncertain how this fantasy would stack up against an afternoon of fielding pop flies with Ernie Banks or shooting baskets with Oscar Robertson, I do know that it was a fantasy weekend that I'll long remember. ☺

For information on the Be Like Bond package, call (888) 788-2683 or visit www.stuartcove.com

The James Bond Fantasy

