

## Taking the Plunge

By Scott D. Jones



Exhilarating ...  
Incredible ...  
Beautiful...

Ask any certified  
scuba diver  
to describe the sport,  
and you're likely to get  
at least one—if not all—  
of these responses.



More and more couples are planning their vacations around scuba diving.

While people have been enjoying the beauty and wonder of scuba diving for more than 40 years, the sport has only recently been gaining acceptance with the general public—and for good reason. Scuba diving is exciting, beautiful and, most of all, fun.

Last year, more than a half million divers took to the waters, according to the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), the world's largest scuba certification organization. PADI reports that scuba certifications have increased by 15% per year during the past decade and the trend continues to grow.

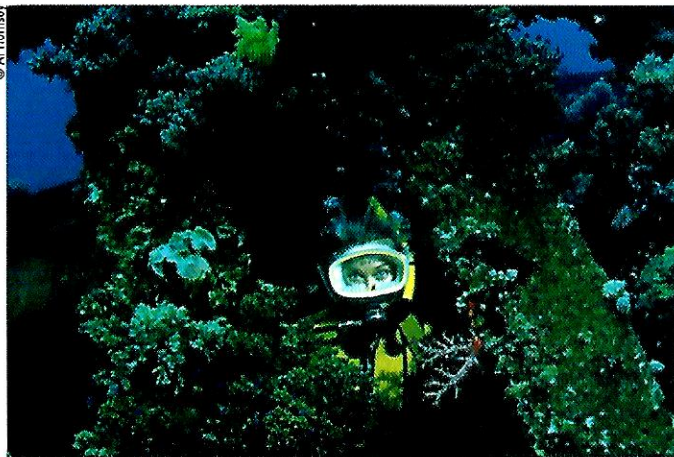
"It's total escapism," says new diver Lourdes Peña, who recently completed her PADI Open-Water Scuba Certification at Hyatt's Red Sail Sports in Aruba. "Breathing underwater is a sensation you can't describe. You have to experience it for yourself to understand."

When Peña decided to try scuba diving, she expected it to be somewhat difficult. "But I couldn't believe how easy it was to get started."

Peña, a public relations executive from New York City, is among the growing number of women turning to the sport. In fact, one third of all new certifications are issued to women divers.

"Diving used to be perceived as a 'macho' sport just for men," says Gary Van Rookel, PADI's marketing director. "Today, people are realizing that you don't need to be Superman to dive." According to Van Rookel, men used to bring their wives and girlfriends into dive shops while they signed up to get certified, but now, he says, "It's the other way around."

Diving is an activity that is best shared, adds Van Rookel. More and more couples are planning their vacations around scuba diving and looking for resorts that can accommodate their diving needs.



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A growing number of divers are taking advantage of referral certification, a process that involves taking the classroom and pool courses at home (Peña took an open-water scuba course at Pan Aqua Diving in New York) and then traveling to a resort destination for the four required open-water certification dives.

"Referrals are very popular, and we're happy to be able to offer them at Red Sail Sports," says dive instructor Steve Creamer. "Travelers may find there's not always [enough] time to complete an open-water scuba course during their vacation, so the referral is a great option for them."

Creamer adds that anyone interested in "getting their feet wet" can enroll in a "Discover Scuba Diving" or "Resort Experience" program. "It's a great way for people to try out diving without having to commit to an open-water course."

In this one-day introduction, participants attend a briefing session to learn the basics and rules of scuba diving. A pool session introducing them to scuba equipment follows. After trying out equipment and being "checked out" by a qualified instructor, participants are taken on a guided scuba dive.



Explore an underwater playground with Hyatt's "Dive Into It" vacation packages.

If you're already one of the millions of certified scuba divers in the United States, you know that open-water certification opens the door to many opportunities. Specialty courses such as advanced open-water, night diving, underwater photography and underwater navigation are all options certified divers can investigate while on vacation.

Peña plans to take a night-diving course on her next trip. "I tried one night dive in Aruba and loved it," she says. "It's totally different from diving during the day. The underwater world comes alive with colorful, nocturnal life."

Six Hyatt resorts, each offering unique diving options, are available in the Caribbean for dive travelers to consider. You can dive with the stingrays in Grand Cayman or explore shallow wrecks in Aruba. There are the "finger keys" of Key West, La Parguera in Puerto Rico (famous for its phosphorescent bay) and 25 dive sites within a 15-minute boat ride from St. John. Whatever your destination, rest assured that the Hyatt resort you select will make your dive vacation one to remember.

## NHL "Tough Guy" Discovers the Peaceful Beauty of Scuba Diving

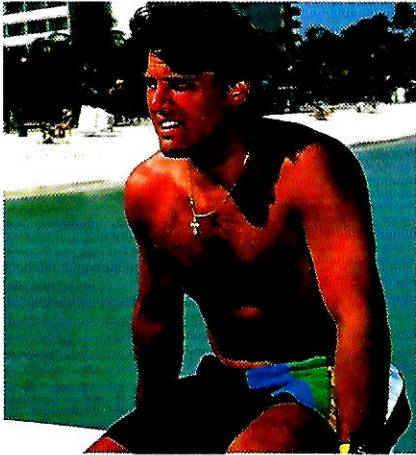
From September through April, Peter Zezel spends his days avoiding the crushing blows and wicked checks from opposing defensemen as a player on the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs. It's only natural that the 28-year-old center would look for a less abrasive activity during his off season.

Last June, the 11-year hockey veteran became a PADI-certified diver with Hyatt's Red Sail Sports during a vacation in Aruba.

"If I had known how simple and exciting scuba diving was, I would have taken a class years ago," says Zezel, who helped drive the Maple Leafs into the Western Conference Finals last season. "Diving's much easier than I thought."

Scuba diving attracted Zezel's attention right away during his post-season stay at the Hyatt Regency Aruba. "It's an escape," he says. "There's so much to see, and it's so relaxing."

But for this Maple Leaf, there's one simple and primary benefit that will keep him diving in the future: "It's much easier for me to dodge the fish than several 200-pound opponents."



Peter Zezel received his PADI Open-Water Certification at the Hyatt Regency Aruba.

### Just Another Day at the "Office"

"I've got the greatest job in the world," Steve Creamer says proudly. "Usually people have trouble getting in touch with me because I'm in my office—and I love it." It's not surprising that Creamer has such a love affair with his job. His "office," you see, is located somewhere between 60 and 80 feet underwater in the crystal blue Caribbean Sea, and he punches his watery "time clock" nearly every day.

A PADI scuba instructor for more than 15 years, Creamer has an all-encompassing appreciation for the underwater world. "We're visitors when we dive," he explains. "It's

important to be aware of our effects on the underwater creatures we come into contact with."

Creamer, who teaches an Underwater Naturalist specialty course for Hyatt's Red Sail Sports on the Caribbean island of Aruba, regularly introduces divers to his "friends" living around his "office" at such dive sites as the *Antilla* and the *Perdenallis*—two famous underwater shipwrecks teeming with aquatic life. "I enjoy pointing out the little things to divers that they would ordinarily just swim by," he explains. "I also go out of my way to stress calm interactions. This helps make sure we don't scare the critters away."

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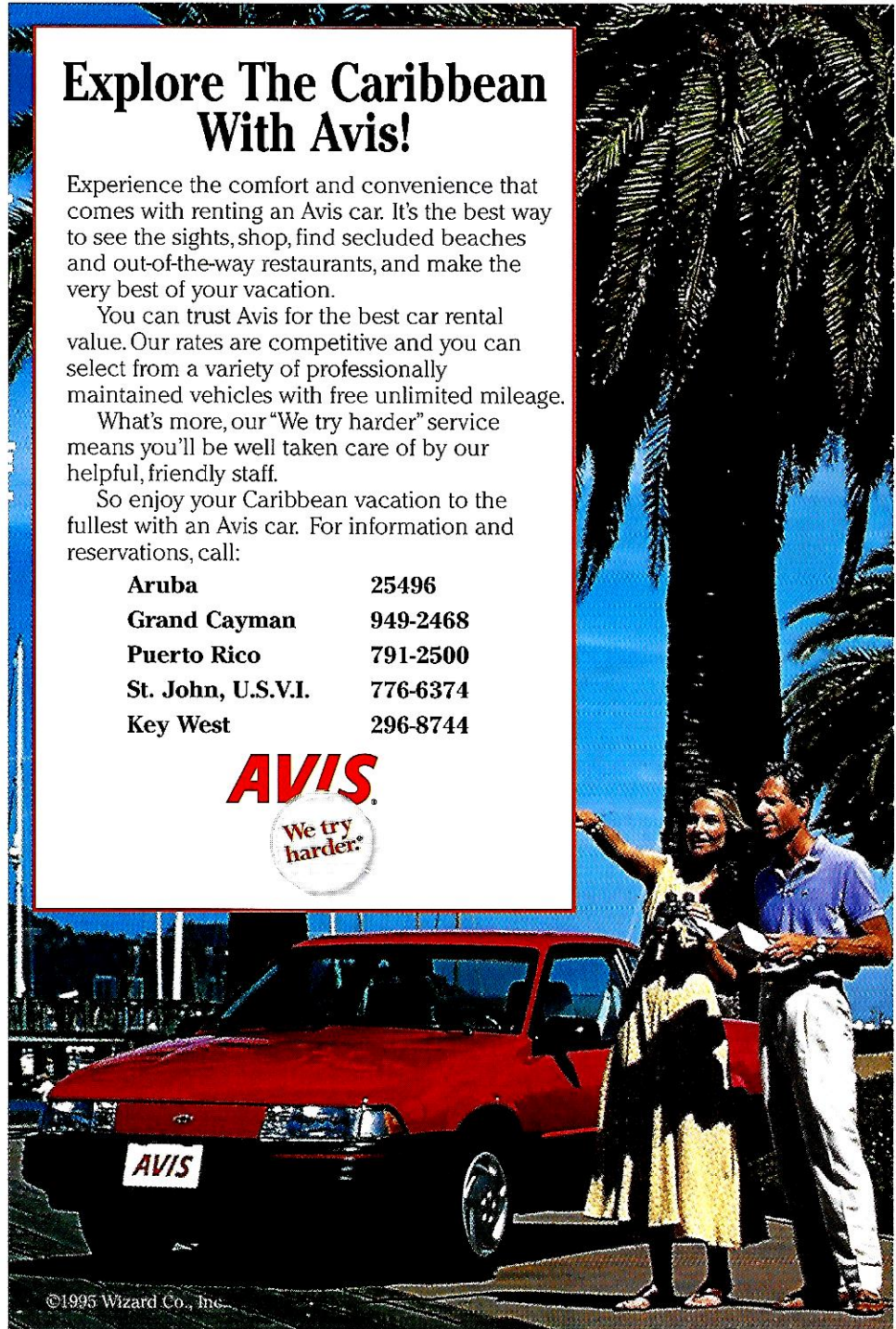
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