

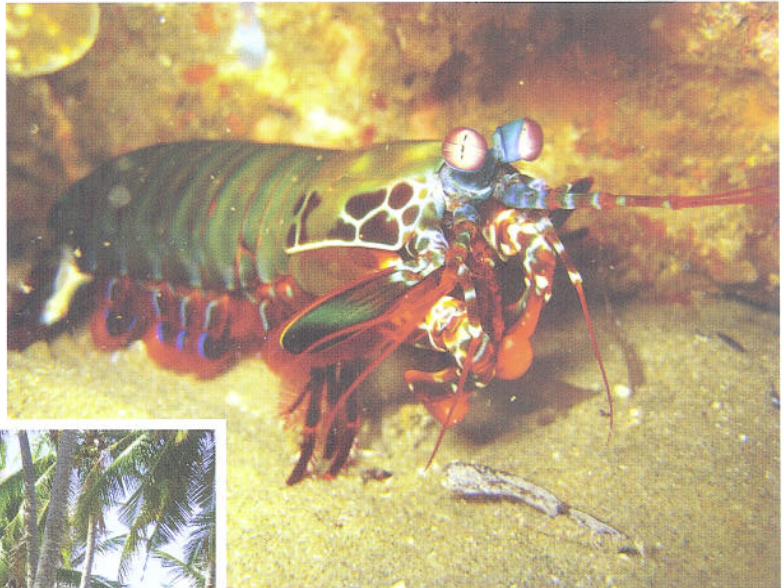
SHAPE Sub Aqua Club in Mozambique.

by Colleen Thompson

The intoxicating mix of skill and adventure that is SCUBA diving recently lured 18 SHAPE Sub Aqua Club (SSAC) members from the overcast skies of Belgium to other side of the world for a trip that many can only dream about: six days of scuba diving in remote Tofo, Mozambique, followed by a two day safari at Kruger National Park, South Africa.

Mozambique's recent 1975 independence from Portugal, followed by civil war until 1992, has left this country, which lies in close proximity to the prime tourist destination of South Africa, still in the midst of establishing infrastructure and tourism. SSAC members sought to take advantage of this and the warm Indian Ocean waters, the still unspoiled coastline with rich, colorful coral reefs, and the very common sightings of Whale Shark. Despite our 26-hour trek, which included three flights (one on a double-prop plane), to a small landing strip in the remote town of Inhambane, we were not disappointed.

divers themselves were used for each dive. The sea conditions varied from very calm to quite choppy. However, the surf entry and exit was made safe and easy by the powerful twin-engine semi-rigid boats, which are designed to make the journey to and from



△Mantis Shrimp.



△Tofo.

Hosted by Tofo (pronounced Tofu) Scuba, we safely accomplished 12 dives in six days. The diving was unique for even the experienced divers as large zodiac boats launched at the shoreline by the



△Noelle Reiners, Juan Babio, Marta Godinez, Matthew Kodrin, Ramon Brown, Tom Sheys, Mary Sheys, Melissa Doyle, Angelo Leone, Colleen Thompson, Jesus Barron, Elisa Bell, Tim Bell, Francoise Jegoux, Gaetan Jegoux, Paul Ladd.



the dive sites as speedy and comfortable as possible. Francoise said, "Two main words to know to dive in Tofo are 'push' and 'jump.' You need a real team to push the boat into the water and strong arms and legs to jump into the boat.

Due to the remoteness of this location, there is no commercial fishing which means the reefs are teeming with colourful tropical fish such as angel, butterfly, surgeon and graceful Moorish idols Large yellow trumpet fish and trigger fish were found in abundance on reefs such as Praia da Rocha, a shallow, low-lying reef, along with large bottom dwellers such as crocodile fish, blue-spotted stingrays and guitar rays. Many large grouper and bass reach well over a meter in length, which is very rare in more developed diving locations.

The configuration of coral bommies created some spectacular swim-throughs and gullies, and are home to beautiful honeycomb moray eels, Egg Cowries, Mantis Shrimp, octopus and countless numbers of macro life such as colourful Nudibranches and Leaf Fish. The list of stunning marine life is endless.

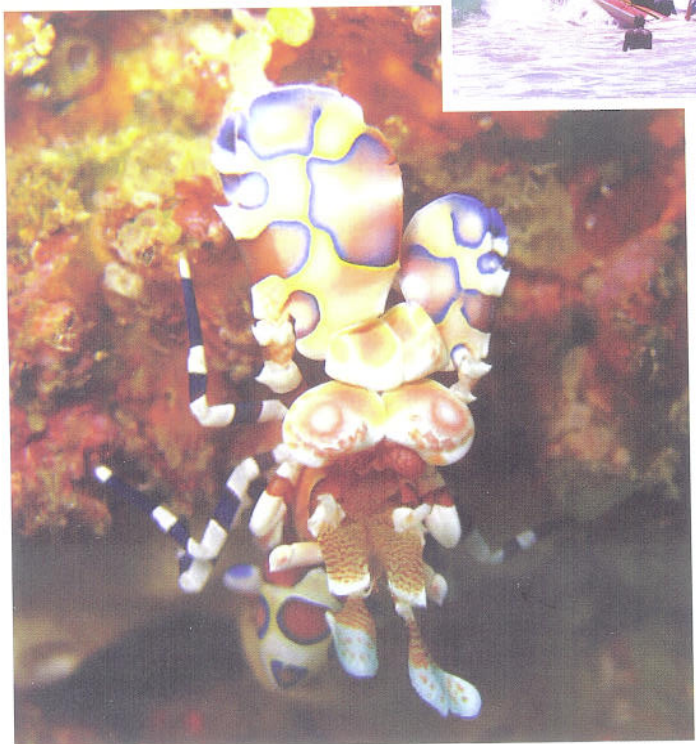
For Elisa Bell, one of the most unique memories from our scuba trip was seeing octopi mating. "We spotted the two octopi on the sandy sea bottom in a shallow reef (about 14 - 17 meters). The two had their arms outstretched, wiggling around and feeling each



other for a few moments. Then, they seemed to crash into each other with all their legs sprawling out in different directions. It looked more like fighting than mating to me. A master of disguise, the octopus can take on the color and texture of the coral around it. During mating they each seemed to be changing to the colors and textures they used in the past randomly, as if they could no longer control it. It was quite a sight to see! After a minute or two, it was over and they swam away from each other; heads leading the way and graceful arms trailing behind."

The highlight of the dive trip was when the first Whale Shark was spotted. Divers scrambled to get their gear on as the Zodiac got into position. Entering the water, the sight that awaited us was incredible. It is impossible to put into words the thrill of swimming next to a 12 meter (36 foot) Whale Shark; a gentle giant effortlessly gliding slowly through the water while filtering plankton through its massive gills. Mary Sheys said, "I loved the whole zodiac thing. It was great fun launching, crashing through the waves! Of course the whale shark encounters were once in a lifetime. Tim Bell's aunt has been chasing them all over the world and never seen one. It was so much fun swimming along with them!"

After six days of surf, it was time for our group to move on to turf. A short plane ride from Inhambane, Mozambique to Maputo, Mozambique, followed by a short bus ride into South Africa and Kruger National Park landed them at



Bushwise Safari Lodge and Royal Kruger Safari Lodge. Situated on the banks of the Crocodile River overlooking the Kruger National Park, the Kruger safari experience was combined with luxurious accommodations.

People all over the world dream of having a safari in a place full of hidden treasures such as this wildlife park; to become one with nature and enjoy the thrill of observing the animal kingdom at close quarters in their natural habitat. We were thrilled with our personalized safari excursions into Kruger in open safari vehicles seeking to spot the Big Five and experience all the wonders of this unique eco-system. Again, we were not disappointed. On the first day of our safari, it seemed all the animals came out to greet and entertain us. Herds of impala, wildebeest, zebra and elephants strolled by going about their day. Huge rhinoceroses watched us, hippopotami lolled in their watering holes, warthogs paraded by with their piglets, monkeys darted across our paths, and countless birds of different sizes and colors were spotted. It was an experience that will not soon be forgotten. Mary expounded, "I was a science teacher and am an animal freak, so it's always been a dream of mine to do a safari. This one far exceeded my expectations - and we were told that this was a slow time of year to see the big animals! My favorite experience, by far, was our Lion encounter. The fact that we were able to get so close that we could hear them panting and crunching on the bones of their recent kill blew my mind. We do a lot of traveling and this was the best deal I've ever seen. Having breakfast on the deck while elephants and hippos played just below was very memorable." The morning of the last day, as if they owned the safari lodge, a mother



<Harlequin Shrimp.

warthog came through our lodge grounds with her piglets.

SSAC Instructor Leone was the organizer behind the trip, managing the details and executing an unforgettable trip for all participants.

SSAC has over 60 members and offers scuba courses at reduced cost to the SHAPE community. For more pictures of this and other trips, or for more information on the SHAPE Sub Aqua Club, visit their website at www.SHAPESUBAQUA.com or email them at shapesubaqua@yahoo.com.