

A DAY UNDER THE OCEAN

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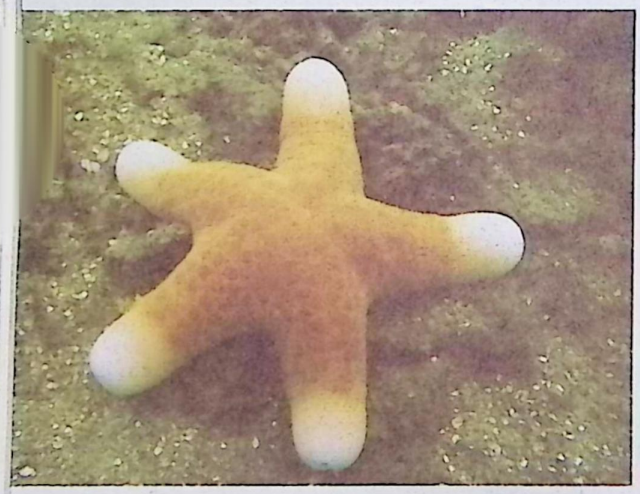
Underwater, a current carried us past the sea lion colony, and as we began to ascend, sunbeams lighted up schools of tropical fish: sergeant majors in their jailhouse stripes, Moorish idols trailing scimitar fins, giant hawkish covered with squiggly Keith Haring lines.

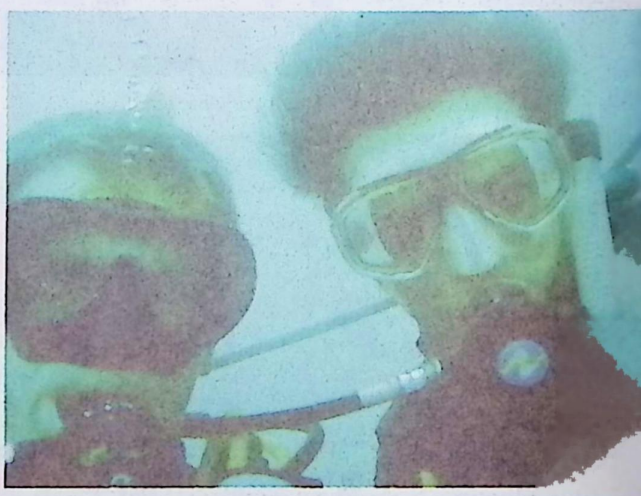
This was one of the many breathtaking scenes I witnessed while scuba diving.

I have seen a lot of documentaries about aquatic life underwater. People in wet suits and oxygen tanks on their backs have always amazed me. I have always wondered how did they do it and how it felt to stay there.

I got more curious about scuba diving when my mother took to me on a snorkeling trip with few of her colleagues to a place called 'K 47'. An informal name used by UN staff, as it is situated 47 km east, from the capital of East Timor, Dili.

With only my face underwater, I got a glimpse of how beautiful the underwater world was. But it felt superficial as I could only stay on the surface of the water and was not being able to thoroughly associate with the marine life. I saw a few people in their scuba gear diving there. I was jealous at the ease with which they could just go in and interact with the marine life. By then I had firmly decided that I would have to give scuba diving a shot.





The mysterious world under the ocean is a fascinating experience for scuba divers.

So my mother and I signed up for scuba lessons from PADI. We had a 'free spirited' instructor. Brazilian by birth, Eric is a dive master. At the start of our first diving lesson my mother was a bit worried about how safe this (scuba diving) actually was. It was only when Eric told, that he had already done more than 200 dives without any inconvenience, that she became relaxed. Later I learned from Eric that he also had 300 sky dives in his bag and he was a sky diving instructor! To be honest, when he told me that, I may have looked normal from the outside but inside I was green with envy for not having his life.

Since it was for the first time, we had to take the diving package offered to novice scuba divers. At first we were given some basic training about the do's and don'ts under water. And later we had to try those in a swimming pool. By the end of the training I learned thumbs up under water meant you have to go the surface. If someone shows you thumbs down, it doesn't mean you are being booed at, rather it means you would like to descend further underwater. By the end of the training we also had the basic idea of how to use the scuba diving equipment ranging from BCD (buoyancy control device), to pressure gauge or the mouth regulator.

It was 10 in the morning. We boarded a minivan from the Padi dive centre. Located on the ground floor of a two-storied building, which harboured on its first floor, my favourite restaurant in Dili, Cast away. Our destination was just on the out-