

Our *American Tabloid* issue takes you on a journey to parts of America you'd least expect to see. Highly individualistic, yet never detached or aloof. Lost within a crowd of thousands, but yet part of a shared experience. Nan hie In spirals into a journey above and under ground in *New York City* going to places that can't be Googled (a considerable feat nowadays) and then breaks the surface to glide into the trendiest bars. She soon realized if you're as brash as New York itself and carve out your own path you'll be welcomed as a native. The Big Apple has long left the rotten-to-the-core years, but still pursues and relishes its decadence with a passion.

Accelerating down the endless strips of highway out to 29 Palms and *Joshua Tree National Park* gave us a sense of what the early settlers wandering out west must have imagined- endless possibilities and unalloyed hopes just waiting on the horizon. Desolation gave way to an appreciation of the spectacular beauty both of the desert and our model Yasmin. We were lucky to be joined by Nigel Barker who shares our appreciation for the understated glamour all of us tried to introduce to a little corner of Joshua Tree.

How to explain *Burning Man*, an annual gathering of 35,000 people, as a celebration of the individual was both a difficult and easy task. Defying stereotypes and classifications, Barbara Traub's sublime interpretation of the event will bring you to the realization that all of us can pursue our individual dreams and ideals while living peacefully together. Her exclusive photography represents her ten years of understanding the Burning Man Project's significance as a participant and photojournalist.

One can't help but admire the courage of the people of *Timor-Leste* who only desire what all of us want: peace and hope. Dan



Editor's note

By Peter Guy

Groshong lived in Timor-Leste for two years chronicling their struggle to rebuild their country. He shows us a beautiful land exuding the simplicity of life and the genuine nature of the people, from spectacular diving to the intoxicating raw smell of nature. His work and recent book have received the support of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and President William J. Clinton.

Travel as a state of mind means that the truth in travel lies in the individual truth you bring to and seek from your journeys.

DAYS OF HOPES AND DREAMS

Looking to the future Timor-Leste offers a frontier of spectacular nature and diving

Story by Daniel J. Groshong and Ann Turner
Photographs by Daniel J. Groshong



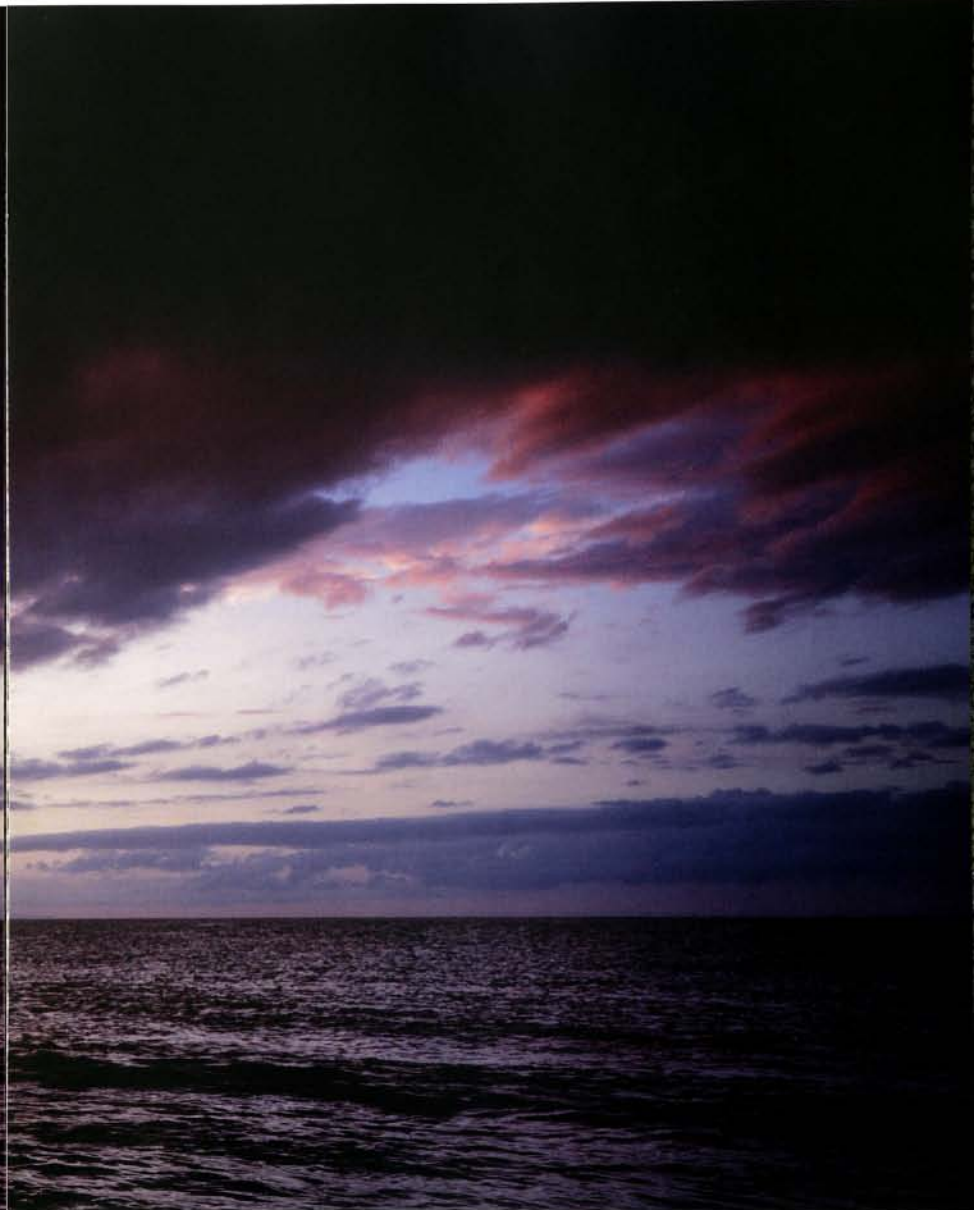
When I made my first visit to Timor-Leste in 1999, it was a difficult and dangerous time for this small country. I was there to photograph the referendum for independence, but despite the shadow that hung over the land, I couldn't help but notice the natural beauty of the island and the strength of its people.

Timor-Leste is a dream come true for naturalists and nature lovers. There is natural beauty that can only exist in a country that is untouched by the world's lust for natural resources. The 14,000 square kilometres of amazing landscape, hundreds of miles of pristine coastline ringed by coral reefs, the misty peak of Mt. Tatmalau, rare migratory birds, sea life and vegetation, and the potential existence of still undocumented flora and fauna, make Timor-Leste one of the more diverse natural places to be found anywhere.

Timor-Leste also boasts a long history and colourful customs and culture. The existence of humans in Timor-Leste dating back some 40,000 years, the 30 languages and dialects spoken here, and six language origins (while all of Europe has a mere three), and the long tradition of animism, make Timor-Leste one of the world's leaders in language and cultural diversity.

My photographs and experience in Timor-Leste spanned several years with the help of countless Timorese from all walks of life. With their assistance, we drove, floated, dived, walked, flew and climbed our way to the far corners of this half island. In fact, we shot over 15,000 digital images and 700 rolls of film including ones taken in 185 underwater dives. Nonetheless, they only represent a mere slice of what the country and its people have to offer.

The bird fauna of Timor-Leste and the surrounding islands is among the most poorly-known in the world. Fortunately, there are quality identification plates of all Timor-Leste birds in the guidebook "Birds of Wallacea" by Coates and Bishop, which makes identification easier. Timor-Leste has a total known bird fauna of about 240 species. The origin of the resident bird fauna is roughly half Australian and half oriental, which makes for an interesting mix. Typical Australian species such as lorikeets, honey eaters and woodswallows can be seen with oriental species such as chats, white-eyes and sunbirds. The best birdwatching sites can be found in **Conis Santana National Park, Tasi-tolu and Lake Laga.**



Just off the coast of Dili a fisherman prepares to throw his net



Numerous tropical reef fish at a dive spot known as The Her, near the town of Com.

Spectacular diving

Timor-Leste offers beautiful diving opportunities because it sits at the heart of the Indo-Pacific "coral triangle," home to more species of marine life than anywhere else on earth. The clean warm waters that surround the world's newest country provide ideal conditions for a delicate coral reef ecosystem, supporting a vast diversity of creatures, from the smallest shrimp to the massive whale shark. Timor-Leste's north coast sits on the edge of an underwater precipice, the Wetar Strait a marine trench almost three kilometres deep, which provides a corridor for pelagic and migrating animals: whales, dolphin, tuna sailfish all patrol offshore. The coastal coral reef is constantly refreshed by the deep water, which brings both predators and prey to within reach of its inhabitants. This is the recipe for some of the world's best diving.

To dive in Timor-Leste can be as simple as a stroll into the sea from the roadside. It can be as exhilarating as a flying drift dive shoulder to shoulder with a school of barracuda. The country's dramatic mountain scenery is often repeated underwater: a vertiginous cliff crashes down to a sweeping beach, which plunges within meters to a spectacular coral wall that slopes off into a marine prairie of sponges and fans grazed by flashing shoals of brilliantly coloured fish. The variety of habitat makes for a wide diversity of dive sites for marine biology enthusiasts and photographers in search of nature's stranger, smaller critters, as well as divers who love to look at the big picture of life on one of the healthiest coral reef systems in the world.

Shore diving is easy; on the north coast, there are dive sites wherever the reef reaches the road. Some of the best diving in the country is to be found within an hour's drive from Dili, around the town of **Metinaro**. Dive operators usually run 2-dive day trips to these sites. (See the list of dive operators).

Secret Garden is just 40 minute's scenic drive from Dili on a winding road that hugs the coast. As divers assemble their equipment in the shade of the palm trees that fringe the sandy beach, they are watched by bemused goats and cattle grazing nearby. After a short surface swim, you are plunged into a coral garden that gleams in the filtered rays of sunlight. There are reef fish of every colour, soft and hard corals jostling with sponges and several species of anemones, each with its own colony of clownfish. Endless streams of glittering fusiliers flash by as resident napoleon wrasse and sweetlips fin gently on the lip of the reef. This is a typical Timorese coral dive; remarkable for the sheer diversity of animals, each in its niche, thriving in the clear, warm water.

Five minute's drive from Secret Garden, one of the country's finest white sand beaches is **Dollar Beach**, which is also the gateway to a vast, sloping reef, as stunningly beautiful at 5 meters as it is at 30. Magnificent acropora table corals are arranged in tiers, with brilliantly coloured anthias dancing on top and angel fish lurking beneath. Bumphead parrot fish lumber by, snapping

off chunks of coral with their beaks, grinding it up, manufacturing a steady stream of new white sand for the beach above. Mantas and eagle rays fly overhead as reef sharks doze on sandy patches below 20 meters. Dollar Beach is animated as creatures weave their way through the bommies, providing chance encounters with turtles, cuttlefish, and trevally. The safety stop can be the highlight of the dive, for the rare opportunity to encounter dugongs who graze the adjacent beds of sea grass. Timor-Leste is fortunate to have a resident population of these charming marine mammals—often called sea cows, which are a species at risk of extinction on a worldwide scale.

K-41, as its name suggests, is a dive site 41 kilometers east of Dili, in the village of Behau. Entering from a pebbly shore shaded by a stand of gum trees, divers find themselves on a coral wall within steps from the beach. A few kilometers further east, **Bob's Rock** is another easy entry site. Both of these sites can be dived at high and low tide and appeal to divers of every kind, with an astounding variety of creatures and habitats ranging from coral gardens to steep walls. Marine biologists and photographers in search of rare creatures find plenty to keep them occupied as they discover pygmy seahorses, abundant nudibranchs, mantis shrimp and garden eels.

Still further east, experienced divers have the chance of adrenalin-pumping close encounters with very large animals at **Whale Shark Point** (also known as **Lone Tree**). This roadside site often has a stiff current, which brings whale sharks, orcas and mantas that cruise by on occasion during the months of August-November.

Spectacular diving is also to be had from **Kom** to the island that marks Timor-Leste's easternmost extremity, **Jaku**. The drive to Kom is about four hours, so divers usually stay overnight or longer, exploring the outstanding beaches, abundant reefs and spotting sharks and mantas in a seascape of stunning hard and soft corals.

Atauru Island, about an hour's speedboat ride from Dili, is also on the pelagic highway, with thrills on the surface as well as below. Whales and huge schools of dolphins often escort dive boats during the crossing to the island. Atauru's waters can offer visibility of up to 40 meters, with plenty of large pelagic action happening in the blue. Atauru is most suited to boat diving with opens up the opportunity for exciting drift dives. Many divers spend a few days at Atauru's eco-tourism lodge, but a two dive, day trip is also easily arranged.

Even visitors on a tight schedule can sample what Timor-Leste has to offer divers at **Dili Rock**, a 15 minute drive west from downtown Dili. A stony mound that juts into the sea close to the roadside, its slopes are home to groupers, sweetlips and bommies bristling with lionfish. An occasional shark, ray or turtle passes through. Suitable for beginners and experts alike Dili Rock is often the venue of the first ocean experience for new divers taking internationally recognized PADI courses.



A multicolored nudibranch patrols the rich coral at K-57.



A mimic filefish pauses in front of a bright red gorgonian fan coral at Dili Rock.

Dive Operators in Timor-Leste

DIVE TIMOR LOROSA'E

Dive Timor Lorosa'e is located in Dili on Avenida De Portugal, Kampung Alor. Just look for the PADI dive centre sign. They also have a dive centre located in Com (the Eastern tip of Timor - Leste).

Website: www.divetimor.com

Tel: +670 723 7092

EXPLORE TIMOR

Explore Bar
Comoro Road, Dili

Website: www.exploretimor.com

Tel: +670 724 6293

FREEFLOW

Pantai Kelapa
Avenida de Portugal, Dili

Website: www.freeflowdiving.com

Tel: +670 723 4614 / +670 723 4615

TIMOR DIVERS NETWORK

Not a dive operator, but very useful for divers

Website: www.timordivers.net.com

Tour Operators

ALDEN BALI EXPRESS

Danny Kristanto

Email: Danny_Kristanto@yahoo.com

Tel: +62-361-481987

The best way to get a connecting Merpati Airlines flight to Dili is to contact Danny Kristanto before you arrive in Denpasar, Bali.

HARVEY WORLD TRAVEL

Website: www.harveydili.com

Tel: +670 390 311 140

TIMOR MEGATOURS

Av. Pres Nicolau Lobato

Hotel Central, Dili

Website: www.timormegatours.com

Tel: +670 723 5199 / +670 331 0699

VILLA HARMONIA ECO TOURS

Villa Harmonia Guest House

Avenida Liberdade de Imprensa no. 418

Becora (one kilometre east of the market)

Email: vilharmonia@yahoo.com

Tel: +670 725 5469

Airlines Flying to Timor-Leste

AIRNORTH

www.airnorth.com.au

KOKOAK AIR

Jorge Serrano, **Tel:** +670-723-1995

MERPATI AIRLINES

Email: www.merpati.co.id

Travel Information about Timor-Leste

ATAURO ISLAND ECO LODGE

www.atauroisland.com

Tel: +760-723-6085

DISCOVER DILI

www.discoverdili.com

EAST TIMOR PRESS

www.easttimorpress.com/en/

GOVERNMENT OF TIMOR-LESTE

www.gov.east-timor.org

TURISMO TIMOR-LESTE

The official Timor Government web site for travel information: www.turismotimorleste.com



A large, bright blue sea Anemone waves it's tentacles in the current in a dive location off Timor's coast, near the town of Maubara



Everyone enjoys swimming at Dollar Beach



Timor-Leste: *Land of Discovery*

Photographs by Daniel J. Groshong

Introduction by President Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

Text by Prime Minister Mari Alkaf, UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan,
President William J. Clinton, Senior Minister José Ramos Horta and Daniel Groshong

(Published by Tavo Photo Group, www.tavophotogroup.com)

Reviewed by Peter Guy

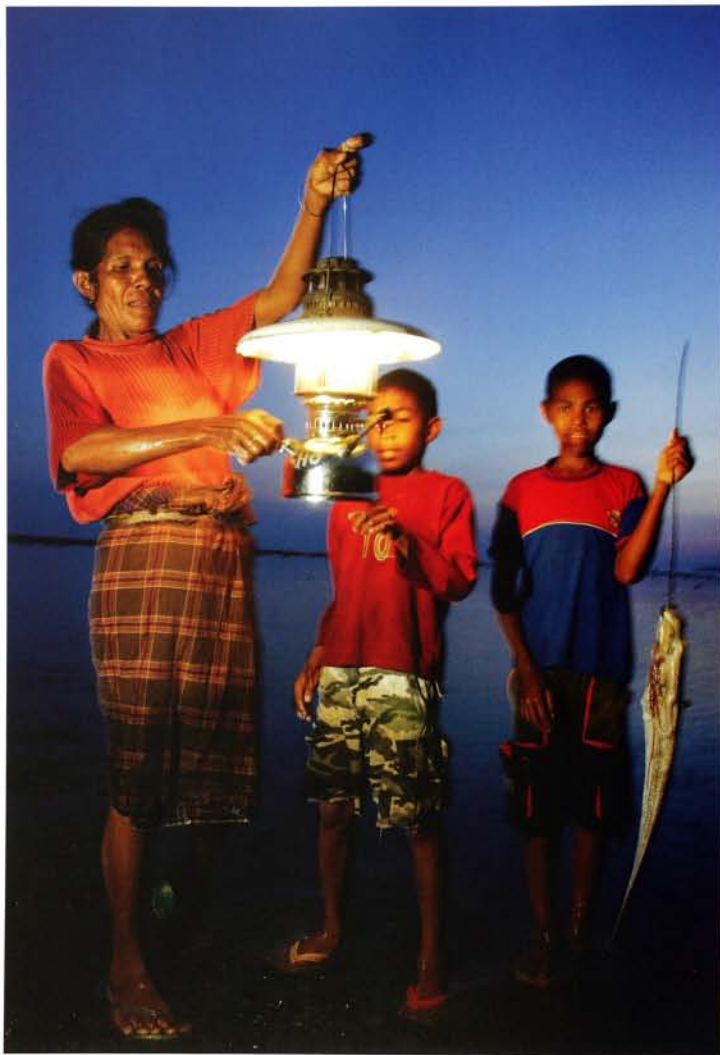
It's a rare pleasure to experience a land and people of bravery and beauty and Daniel Groshong shares that with us in intimate detail in the first ever photography book depicting Timor-Leste's cultural, natural and underwater wonders. Emerging from a long period of armed conflict the people of Timor-Leste are committed to building a better future through an environmentally friendly tourist industry that encompasses grass roots links with the entire community. The end of the conflict allows tourists to experience this pristine destination and its warm, simple and kind people.

The air of hard won freedom resonates throughout each chapter that is edited and organized comprehensively covering almost every aspect of Timor without sacrificing a relaxed and casual viewpoint. Two chapters entitled "Urban" and "Coastal" capture the daily lives of Timorese as they work and play. Despite their hardship, there's no evidence of bitterness; rather everyone, especially children are happy to be able to get on with their lives. The joy of being around loved ones and enjoying simple pleasures is infused in these images. Subsistence farming and fishing are a way of life for many Timorese; this creates a recognition and bond with nature and those around you such that sharing and consideration with others are deeply ingrained in the culture. Rice farming and coastal fishing continue

to be important sources of food for the local population. The sincerity and friendliness of this culture are evident and intriguing as one moves about the country sharing a humble home with a poor, but welcoming family or enjoying a convivial conversation with people riding in a slightly overcrowded bus. The "Sea" chapter displays the incredible diving and marine culture that Timor-Leste has to offer tourists. With over 200 dives around Timor-Leste under his belt, Groshong has authoritatively catalogued the major dive sites allowing readers and curious divers to view a wide cross section of what awaits them.

The chapters "Inland" and "Mountain" highlight the low lying of villages and the slopes of Mt. Matebian. From traditional, sacred house blessing ceremonies to an Easter ceremony with a strange mix of Catholic and ancient traditions, Groshong maintains a closeness to the subjects without an overly documentary tone.

The significance of this book and the people of Timor's peaceful aspirations are underscored by the support they have received by the dignitaries who have contributed their endorsements and stories in hope that they reach a wide global readership and inspire continued solidarity with the efforts of the Timorese to build a democratic state.



Checking the pressure in her lantern in the early morning, a woman with two boys forage for sea creatures while the reef is exposed at low tide

