



MONARCH PASSPORT

Monarch

Passport

SPRING 2015 £3.50 (FREE TO MONARCH CUSTOMERS)

It's all part of the service

BEAUTIFUL PLACES

WHEN IT'S THE **VIEW** THAT MATTERS MOST

SUN-DRENCHED
GOLF *in the*
CANARIES

THE MANY
WAYS TO OWN A
HOLIDAY HOME

THE LURE *of*
THE RED SEA

SPRING 2015

ALSO AVAILABLE TO READ FROM WITHIN MONARCH'S APP

Welcome aboard!



OVER THE NEXT few months, Monarch will complete another phase of its restructure. We have made a conscious decision to make some major changes to our network by removing long-haul and charter flights from the schedule and focus on our "heartland" of European leisure destinations. In April, we will stop our operation from East Midlands airport and focus on developing routes from our five other UK bases. These changes will enable us to utilise our aircraft better by increasing frequencies to some of our most popular destinations, allowing us to improve our on-time performance and focus on building our business around our customers.

Some of the routes that we used to serve as charter routes will become scheduled routes this summer, including Rhodes, Zante and Preveza. While other destinations in the Canaries and the Mediterranean have increased frequencies, so you have greater flexibility when booking your holiday with us. We have also put part of our next season's winter schedule on sale and will be adding further flights and routes throughout the summer as we confirm our schedule.

After your Monarch flight, you will

receive an email from Feefo asking you to rate your experience with us. Feefo is an independent company that offers consumers the opportunity to review everything about us; from your booking and online experience to the flight. We are proud to be the first airline in the world to encourage our customers to tell us about their experiences, and we listen to what you say. Since we introduced Feefo in January 2013, over 200,000 customers have posted reviews, and 92% of those people rate our service as excellent.

With a solely scheduled network, our fleet will consist of 32 aircraft and a further two on standby. Having said goodbye to the last of our Boeing aircraft in December last year, the current fleet consists entirely of Airbus aircraft. As I write, we

currently have two Airbus A330s in the fleet, but they will be leaving in April and we will operate only A320s and A321s until April 2018, when we take delivery of the first of our brand-new Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft.

I hope that you enjoy your flight with us today, and I would like to thank you for choosing to fly with us. We hope to see you on board again soon.

Andrew

Andrew Swaffield
CEO The Monarch Group

WIN
a luxury
golfing
break in
Spain (p38)

Passport

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CONTRIBUTORS This issue of Passport has been lovingly crafted by some of the best in the business



PETER ZELEL

Self-taught photographer Peter has been making a living from his art since 2008. His eye for detail and knack for finding a unique angle make our cover picture one to remember.



JO CAIRD

Jo's interests stretch far and wide. Not only is she an arts and travel writer for *The Guardian* and *Condé Nast Traveller*, she's also a keen diver and penned the feature on the Red Sea (p64).



ANDREW MARSHALL

Golf might be his passion but having visited over 50 countries, there's no doubt the urge to travel is in Andrew's blood. That's why the feature on golf in the Canaries (p49) was his perfect assignment.



CHARLENE HUTSEBAUT

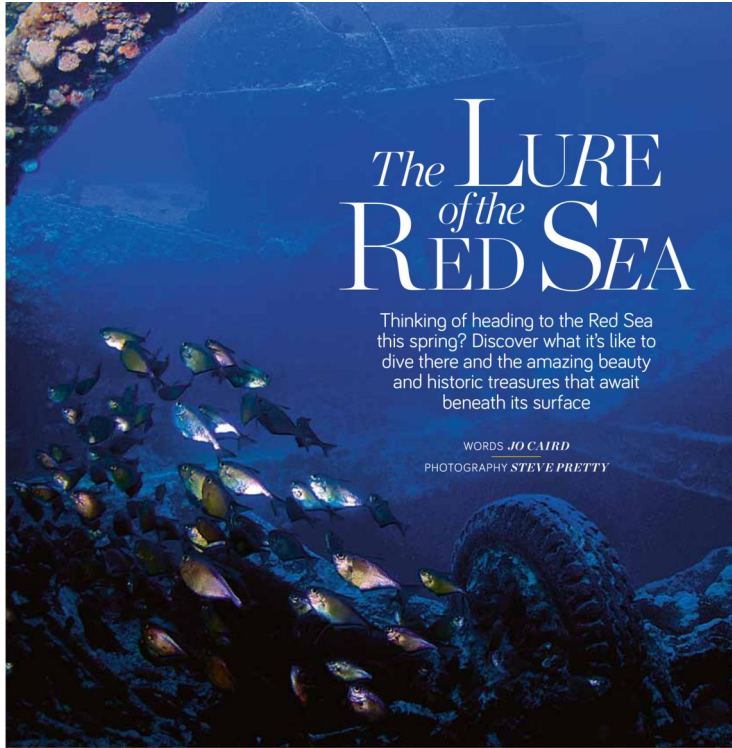
Personal trainer Charlene is passionate about inspiring people to live a healthy, active lifestyle – see charlenehutsebaut.com. Her golf exercises on p59 could be exactly what you need.



GILLY PICKUP

Author and journalist Gilly was born with an insatiable curiosity about other countries and is skilled at finding remote spots – perfect for our story on La Graciosa (p20).

Cover: Peter Zelel



The LURE *of the* RED SEA

Thinking of heading to the Red Sea this spring? Discover what it's like to dive there and the amazing beauty and historic treasures that await beneath its surface

WORDS *JO CAIRD*
PHOTOGRAPHY *STEVE PRETTY*





Red Sea diving

IT TAKES A FEW SECONDS for my eyes to adjust to the darkness after the bright blue of the water outside the wreck, but when the walls and floor of a smallish hold come into view, it's something of an anticlimax. A few pieces of coal are piled up in the corners, nothing more. Dispirited, I swim through a doorway and that's when I see them: dozens of Bedford trucks sitting nose to tail in the gloom, each one loaded with motorcycles, a thick layer of grime coating every surface.

This is the *SS Thistlegorm*, a British Merchant Navy ship sunk while delivering vehicles, guns and ammunition to support the Allied forces fighting in North Africa during WWII. Practically untouched since the explosion that sank it, the 126m wreck is now one of the most famous sites in the world for scuba-diving.

ADDICTIVE

You can reach the *Thistlegorm* on a day trip from Sharm el-Sheikh on the Red Sea, but I've arrived at this remarkable place on a "liveboard", a floating hotel for divers. It's my first time on the wreck but one of my fellow divers is taking his 60th plunge – it doesn't take me long to realise why he keeps coming back.

As I shine my torch over the vehicles in a series of cargo holds with increasingly tight headroom, I spot first one, then two, and eventually lots of Wellington boots. Blown into every conceivable nook and cranny by the blast that ripped through the ship when a pair of German bombers unleashed their loads on the night of 6 October 1941, they're a strangely moving reminder of the human casualties of that terrible conflict.

Outside, the devastation is much more striking, all twisted metal and snapped cables, the ship's stern upended and the seabed littered with tanks and ammunition. As I hover over this scene of chaos, it's impossible not to think of the men who died here – four sailors and five members of the Royal Navy gun crew who were on board to ensure the ship's safe passage.

The following day offers cheerier scenes, as I explore a pair of neighbouring coral reefs in the Ras Mohamed National Park. Just an hour's boat ride from Sharm, this patch of protected land and sea lies right at the southernmost tip of the Sinai peninsula. ▶

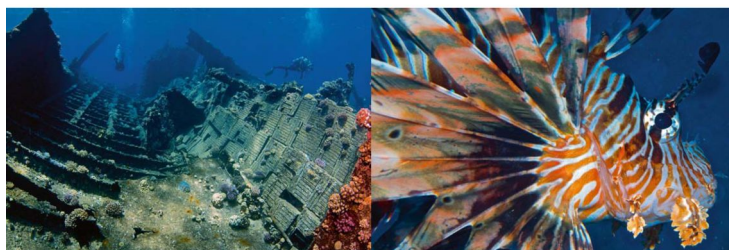
Main picture: swimming with the fishes in the wreck of the *Thistlegorm*. Below, left to right: colourful fish and coral on a reef; diving into the depths; hawksbill turtles have swum the seas for millions of years

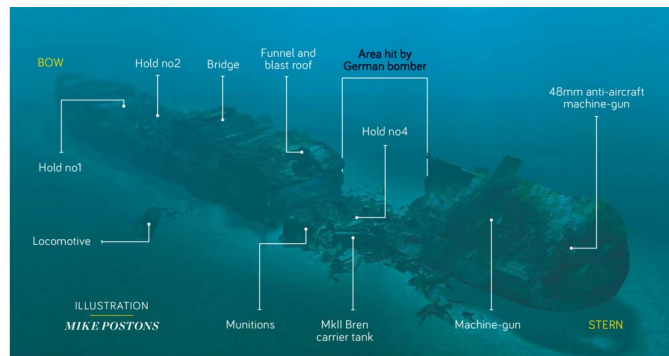
Red Sea diving

A shoal of unicorn fish hang in the water around me, drawing my gaze out into the dark blue of the open ocean and down into the thrilling nothingness



Above: descending over Thomas Reef in the Straits of Tiran. Below left: the wreck of *Chrisoula K*, a Greek-registered freighter that sank in August 1981 after it struck Sha'ab Abu Nuhas (a coral reef that projects into the shipping channel). Below right: a lionfish





I enter the water directly above Shark Reef, a vertical wall, covered with hard and soft coral, that drops nearly 800m to the seabed below. As I descend, a shoal of unicorn fish hang in the water around me, drawing my gaze out into the dark blue of the open ocean and down into the thrilling nothingness below. I've never been sky-diving, but this must be what it feels like, except slowed down to a pace at which there's ample time to take in the view.

As the water levels out at about 30m (beginner divers can stay in shallower water), I'm carried by a gentle current along the wall, across a sand patch and into a garden of coral so bright and colourful that I gasp at the sight of it.

UNDERWATER BATHING

Named after the ship that struck it and then sank into deep water here in 1980, Jolanda Reef is now home to the remains of the vessel's cargo of bathroom fittings. I don't make it round to the far side of the reef on this dive - I've used up too much of my air watching an adorable pair of masked boxfish playing in the fan coral - but am assured by my fellow divers that the toilets, bathtubs and sinks lying on the tropical sand

Above and below: the SS *Thistlegorm* was an armed Merchant Navy ship that was sunk by German bombers in October 1941. It was discovered by the French explorer, film-maker, conservationist and scientist Jacques Cousteau in the early 1950s

make for a very curious sight indeed.

On the way back in the boat, a pod of dolphins surfaces not far away. I've already taken off my gear, but manage to pull on a snorkel and mask, and jump in just as the group starts to dive, ducking under the water in time to watch them swim gracefully away. I'm in their presence for only a moment, but it's one I'll never forget.

There are plenty more spectacular wrecks to be seen in the Red Sea. Egypt's waters may be beautiful, but they contain hidden dangers for ships - countless craft have struck these shallow reefs on their way through the busy shipping channels of Gubal and Tiran.

THE MAIN ATTRACTION

But the Red Sea isn't just for wreck-heads. There are few locations in the world where you'll find such a quantity and variety of marine life with such excellent visibility, and fewer still that are so well set up to welcome visitors. Coral, reef fish, crustaceans, sea slugs - I'm soon so used to seeing unusual creatures that I stop bothering to point them out to my diving buddy.

I'm making my way slowly through calm, shallow water at Gordon Reef in the Strait of Tiran (where the massive, rusting hull of the Panamanian cargo ship *Loullia* sticks out above the water line) when I come across a lone hawksbill turtle munching intently through a patch of coral on the sea floor. Totally unbothered by my presence, it uses its front fins for purchase while ripping chunks off the reef with its sharp, curving beak.

I'm close enough to touch it (but don't - one of the first things you learn in dive training is never to interfere with marine life), and to notice old scar patterns on its beautiful, metre-long shell. I stay with the turtle for



Red Sea diving

half an hour, completely enthralled by this encounter with a creature whose ancestors have been swimming the seas for 100 million years.

One of the major benefits of a liveboard are the opportunities for night diving, and some of the most exhilarating animal experiences of my trip take place after dark. My first dive on the extremely wrecked remains of the Barge, a craft of unknown date and provenance sitting on the seabed at just 14m in the Strait of Gubal, is during the daytime, but it's on the later night dive that the site really comes into its own.

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL

I swing my torch beam through pitch-black water and light upon some of the strangest fish I've ever seen. Well camouflaged against the reef, stonefish keep absolutely still to avoid detection by predators. It's me that needs to beware, however. They're extremely poisonous – contact with bare skin would cause serious irritation.

Exotic-looking lionfish – also poisonous – take advantage of the light from my torch to hunt for their supper, while huge silver jack dart past at lightning speed, picking off prey from a terrified shoal of silversides. Clownfish snooze in their anemone homes, and phosphorescent plankton light up the darkness with every wave of my arm.

Most thrilling of all, however, is an encounter that takes place in very shallow water at the end of the dive. An enormous moray eel – nearly 2m long and at least the width of my hand across – is ripping into the coral. Just as I go to move on, the creature pulls a big octopus from a hole in the reef. The pair writhe furiously around on the seabed, swirling up eddies of sand as they go, the octopus fighting for its life.

Five, 10, 12 minutes pass and still they battle on, but it's clear that the game is up. The octopus's tentacles gradually loosen their grip on the moray's massive head as the victor begins to eat its prey alive. My air starting to run low, I make my way back to the boat. It's the final dive of the trip and I've never felt my heart beat so fast. ■

Find out more about the Thistlegorm by visiting <http://3deepmedia.co.uk/examples/thistlegorm/>

How to get there

Monarch flies to Sharm el-Sheikh from Birmingham, London Gatwick, London Luton and Manchester. To Hurghada from Manchester, and from Birmingham until 12 May 2015 and from London Gatwick until 15 May 2015. Find the latest fares at monarch.co.uk



If you're coming to the Red Sea to dive for the first time, the resorts of Sharm el-Sheikh and Hurghada are both excellent places to gain certification. You'll spend a few days learning the theory and completing your confined-water dives before heading out on open-water dives at sites close to the resort. Alternatively, maximise your holiday time by doing the scientific stuff with a UK diving centre before you fly.

Which diving sites you can visit depends on your certification level, so check in advance



How to do it

with the diving centre at your resort if there are particular ones you're keen to try. All the sites covered here are accessible on day trips from Sharm el-Sheikh or Hurghada, and there are many more to explore from the shore or on short-hop boat trips from each resort.

A more convenient way of experiencing the best of Egypt's diving sites, however,

is on an all-inclusive "liveboard" boat. With itineraries from a few days to a couple of weeks, these craft hop from one remote, spectacular location to the next, allowing you to do up to four dives a day, including night dives. Each diver sets up his or her gear at the beginning of the trip and dismantles it only after the final dive of the holiday, with staff taking care of air refills between dives. And, as you anchor at diving sites overnight, exclusive access to the reef first thing in the morning is practically guaranteed.

A rigid inflatable boat takes you from the "liveboard" boat on which you stay, giving you early access to the reef

